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W. L. WATKINSON, D.D.

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Life's Unexpected Issues

And Other Papers on Character and Conduct

By
WILLIAM L. WATKINSON, D.D., LL.D.
Author of "The Fatal Barter," "The Bane and the Antidote," "The Blind Spot," etc.

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TO

The Memory

OF

MY DEAR WIFE

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I

LIFE'S UNEXPECTED ISSUES

Things which we looked not for.—Isa. lxiv. 3.

THE routine of life is familiar to all, and, anticipating the future, we picture it as agreeing in the main with things as they are. "Probability is the guide of life," and from the aspects of to-day we draw inferences as to what we may reasonably expect farther on. But how frequently our reasonings are falsified, and we find ourselves in unfamiliar situations! The unfoldings of life surprise us; our circumstances could not possibly have been foreseen, our position is unaccustomed, our experiences unparalleled. Probability may be the guide of life, yet vast scope is left for the improbable; again and again we see the incredible of one day becoming history on the next. The most probable thing, after all, is that the future will be utterly unlike the present, bringing to pass events now farthest from our thought.

Pleasant surprises await us. "The surprise view" of Fountains Abbey is known to many. The visitor is conducted along the pathway until a certain eminence is gained, when the guide

suddenly flings open a door, and a panorama of memorable beauty greets the eye. God also startles and delights His people with such discoveries. We are perhaps haunted with fears; and if not exactly in the mood of fear, we are certainly not in the mood of expectation, when an unforseen combination of circumstances confers affluence, distinction, and happiness beyond our rosiest dream: things "which we hoped not for," that surpass our most sanguine expectation. "Thou surprisest us with the blessings of goodness" (Ps. xxi. 3). "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them. The Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad." "And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, He said unto them, Have ye here any meat?" "And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. And they said unto her, Thou are mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel."

The sweet surprise may not seem to come often; yet strangely mournful is the life in which it never occurs at all. Heaven works out an apparently incredible salvation: the thing greatly

feared dissolves like mist; an envied but despaired-of blessing is flung into our lap; a door of splendid hope opens in a dead wall; our ship of gold, so long delayed, is signalled; we awake to find ourselves famous. Bits of romance, tags of poetry, snatches of ecstasy, enter into the life of all; and even when good fortune does not reach the dramatic, it is sufficiently accentuated to prove greatly welcome and refreshing. The miner rarely finds a monster diamond, or the diver a big pearl, and to the majority the flush of success is almost the miracle of life; yet the great Father does not forget the lowliest of His children, lighting up the winter of their discontent with beams of spring, sprinkling gold dust on their meagre lot, causing a rose to bloom on their monotonous path, lest their spirit should fail before Him and the souls that He has made.

Painful surprises are a common experience: "Terrible things which we looked not for." God works out His purposes, alike of judgment and mercy, in a way that transcends the common order. The "surprise views" of life are often the reverse of the pleasant experience of Fountains Abbey. Some trials we foresee, discount, and brace ourselves to meet, but other strokes of adversity astonish us by their suddenness and uniqueness. Misfortune comes in a time that we look not for it. Solomon affirms that "to everything there is a season, and a time to every pur-

pose under the heaven"; yet it would often seem as though things mistook their season, falling out with painful untimeliness. Anxieties natural to mature life trouble youth, the disabilities of age mar manhood, and the troubles that we might reasonably suppose to pass with our noon revive to add consternation and bitterness to our closing years. We are confounded by a sunken rock in a smooth sea, by a thunderbolt out of a blue sky, by frost in the time of roses. Adversity comes in unexpected forms. The strong develop a diseased organ; the trusted friend bertays; the staff on which we lean pierces the hand; gilt securities change into waste paper; the popular candidate is defeated; the rock on which we built proves a stone of emptiness; the gate of the churchyard receives the desire of our eyes; the brightest of sunshine is suddenly succeeded by the deepest of shadows. Adversity comes in unexpected ways. It is looked for on the highway, and it crosses the fields. It gets at us by crooked pathways of which we could never have dreamed.

To this extent, then, are we the sport of circumstance. We are challenged by losses and sorrows that no shrewdness could predict, no prudence provide against, no intervention break or soften. The almanac foretells the order of the seasons, the eclipses of sun and moon, the changes of the weather, but furnishes no hint of

the vicissitudes which agitate our hearts and homes. The uncertainty of life is a tremendous and dangerous fact, dashing the cup from our lip, quenching in the blackness of night brilliant hopes. "The caravans that travel by the way of them turn aside; they go up into the waste, and perish. The caravans of Tema looked, the companies of Sheba waited for them. They were ashamed because they had hoped; they came thither, and were confounded" (Job vi. 18-20). As the streams dry up, and the caravans with their riches wander and perish in the wilderness, leaving the merchants who hoped for great gains red with shame, so in a day do our sanguine hopes perish. The collapse of Job himself affects so deeply the imagination of successive generations, because it is a lurid picture of the unheralded tragedies which give human life its deeper pathos.

Note, then, the attitude and spirit in which the possibilities of untried life should be met.

Let us *expect* the unexpected. This apparent paradox suggests a great truth and duty. Our natural tendency is to look upon things as stable, and to infer that they will continue mainly as they are. We assume that our houses will endure; fondly we call them by our own name. We fail sufficiently to recognize the element of instability in human life, and this failure accounts for much of the poignancy of disappointment.

Modern modes of thinking also tend to render us still more insensible to the transitoriness and uncertainty of things. The prevalent philosophy of evolution suggests orderly sequence, leaving little if any room for the catastrophic; science, insisting on inviolable law, encourages us to expect only uniformity and gradation; and in our daily affairs we are ever enlarging the sphere of prescience and insurance until it shall comprehend the whole area of life and provide for the whole gamut of fortune. Yet, practically, human life can never be reduced to system and calculated upon with certainty; it ever implies contingency, fortuitousness, an element of speculation and surprise, which cannot be eliminated and for which we must always make allowance. Talk as we may about fixed order, necessary sequence, the law of average, and so forth, unknown factors are active on every side at this very hour, and unsuspected consequences will startle us before many days or hours are over.

It is strange, indeed, that whilst we know so much about the heavens, being able to trace the orbits of suns and stars, and to calculate the moment of eclipses hundreds of years away, we are yet unable to understand the happenings close to us, the fallings out of things by which we are so deeply affected, and cannot even surmise what shall be on the morrow. We may not reduce life to the categories of the mechan-

ical. At every point ruled by law, it is yet all the while disturbed by apparent irregularities, dislocations, and confusions, which leave ample room for marvels, romances, tragedies, clapping of hands, wringing of hands. The "grooves of change" are exceedingly eccentric, and defy prediction. In the great argument called history there is, we fully believe, no failure of logic; it is interrupted, however, by many parentheses which appear capricious, and the race is kept sensitive and anxious all through the long controversy. Heaven argues in events, and surprise power is a salient feature of its eloquence. Let us, then, not as a sentiment, but as a habit, recognise the fleeting character of all things, the probability at all times of immense unsettlement and transformation. Build on nothing either bright or sad. We cannot predict what pattern will disclose with the next turn of the kaleidoscope. God keeps all things within His own knowledge and sovereignty, so that we may live in trembling dependence upon Him, obedient to His will, and waiting in faith and hope the ripening of His purpose.

Let us *prepare* for the unexpected. In certain worldly callings we observe an order of intellect that deals promptly and effectually with the unexpected. In mid-ocean, when the passengers are thrown into panic by sudden accident, the captain remains calm and confident, giving orders with

perfect self-possession; the great engineer constructing a tunnel knows at once what is to be done when the water breaks in, although everybody else is flurried and paralysed; and the military master in the critical hour comprehends the situation at a glance, and coolly takes his measures. These superior spirits have often looked forward, perceived these possibilities, mentally grappled with the problems involved, and when the day of trial flashes upon them they are not found wanting. Somewhat thus should we anticipate the contingencies of life; cultivating a prescience of mind and heart for the unknown that excludes panic and disarms peril.

Let us stand prepared for the agreeable. We flatter ourselves that we are always fit for this experience, yet this by no means follows. Thoughtful men are justly suspicious of the flatteries of fortune. In a letter of Emerson's, recently published, this solicitude finds expression. Writing to a relative he refers to the poverty and many troubles of their early days, and to "the straitened lines" on which they walked up to manhood. He remarks upon the altered aspect of things, upon the fact that they were all prospering far more than any of them had anticipated. He then proceeds: "Now I add to all this felicity a particular felicity which makes my own glass very much larger and fuller. And I straightway say, Can this hold? Will God make

me a brilliant exception to the common order of His dealings which equalises destinies? There's an apprehension of reverse always arising from success. But is it my fault that I am happy, and cannot I trust the Goodness that has uplifted to uphold me? The way to be safe is to be thankful. I cannot find in the world without, or within, any antidote, any bulwark, against this fear like this—the frank acknowledgment of unbounded dependence. Let into the heart that is filled with prosperity the idea of God, and it smooths the giddy precipices of human pride to a substantial level; it harmonises the condition of the individual with the economy of the universe." This is the spirit in which we should entertain fortune; meeting it with deep humility, conscious of our unbounded dependence, seeking to employ it unselfishly, prepared to yield it with resignation.

> And if some things I do not ask
> In my cup of blessing be,
> I would have my spirit filled the more
> With grateful love to Thee.

Otherwise prosperity proves our undoing. Condemned Chinese mandarins are choked with gold-leaf; and the souls of the lucky are sometimes dispatched the same way.

Let us also fit ourselves for the unpleasant and painful. A distinguished professor, in a

Primer on Teaching, thus advises young teachers: "Go to school each day with your mind prepared for something disagreeable." Good advice for other than teachers. Whatever may be our place and calling, frequent disappointment and trial are inevitable, and we ought to be equipped and expectant. If we are deceived in our outlook, it is a form of disappointment easily got over. And in counselling this readiness for vexatious incidents, we are simply suggesting the caution of the shipmaster who keeps everything in readiness for rough weather. How many sins are sins of surprise! Men are not so much guilty of deliberate transgression—they are hurried into temptation. We are taken unawares, and the spark of anger is struck, the sharp word escapes us, the impatient gesture offends, the action that inflicts unnecessary pain is hastily initiated. Our sins of surprise constitute a large portion of our guilt; they occasion no inconsiderable portion of our regret and shame. We need at all times to enter the world alive to its possibilities of trial; and with strength, patience, judgment, and consideration ready at a moment's call to meet its severest demands.

Yes, we must not only stand prepared for irritating things, but for grievous ones. All know what is meant by a person in unexpected circumstances "losing his head." He was thunder-

struck, confounded, lost his sanity and grasp upon things as they are, and said and did foolish things. The faculty of a man is tested in these heightened moments—in the dilemma one keeps his presence of mind, the other is bewildered. Saints are apt to "lose their head" in their dealings with God and in their interpretations of His government. Job's wife lost her head, and shrieked: "Curse God, and die." Job kept his. "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." The heart of many a saint is right even when he loses his head and speaks unadvisedly with his lips. The poor brain is dazed whilst the heart is true, and therefore all comes right when the stupor or paroxysm is past. Still, while our heart is kept in God's love, reason and faith should keep their seat. The grand preservative against intense hours is habitual trust in God and a just sense of the value and proportion of earthly things; with such habitual confidence and judgment we shall neither lose our dignity nor compromise our peace. If a grave crisis is sprung upon us, there shall follow no disabling shock; if an extraordinary success surprise, there shall be no delirium.

Let us *profit* by the unexpected. For indeed we may profit largely by the unexpected. In fact, through the insecurity of life and of nearly everything that appertains to it, we are developed and perfected. It is in the midst of uncertainty that

we realize our entire dependence upon God, that our vigilance is stimulated, that our reality and fidelity of principle are put to the test, that the strength of the soul is elicited and exercised and all its latent possibilities brought into the light and perfected. A life of routine, a life in which all was customary and expected, would leave us insipid and unrealised. The discipline of the unexpected sharpens our vision, solidifies our fibre, calls out our utmost courage, prudence, and strength. The sense of uncertainty puts us altogether into the hand of God, and makes us to possess all the treasures of His purpose. And whatever the surprise or the shock may be, it will equally avail if we accept it faithfully and hopefully. "All things work together for good to them that love God"; things "not looked for" amongst the rest. He who, "missing of his design, lays hold with ready hand on the unexpected event, and turns it to his own account," is the brave, wise servant, "taking his revenge on fortune." Heaven often disappoints because it has prepared some better thing for us. Let us, therefore, boldly hail all events. The native vessels which sail the White Sea are so built and rigged that they can take advantage only of winds blowing from half the points of the compass. On the other hand, modern ships are so constructed that every wind that blows serves them. Souls ought to possess a similarly catholic

and elastic responsiveness. "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and suffer need." Here was a pilot who knew how to navigate the sea of life, to profit by every shifting breeze, and so to bring his argosy rich with treasure safely into the desired haven.

And so I dare not dare to pray
For winds to waft me on my way,
But leave it to a Higher Will
To stay or speed me, trusting still
That all is well, and sure that He
Who launched my bark will sail with me
Through storm and calm, and will not fail,
Whatever breezes may prevail,
To land me, every peril past,
Within His sheltering heaven at last.

Then, whatsoever wind doth blow,
My heart is glad to have it so;
And blow it east, or blow it west,
The wind that blows, that wind is best.

II

THE ASTRONOMY OF THE BLIND

Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged.—1 Cor. ii. 14.

THE confident manner in which men destitute of religious experience and sympathy treat the doctrines of religion must often excite surprise. Lacking any real knowledge of the great truths they airily discuss, not having seriously studied these truths, nor put them to the test of experience, they yet criticise and reject with the utmost assurance the most vital articles of the faith. The other day we listened to a medical man who dealt rather peremptorily with one at the table who gave an opinion upon a particular malady. The physician could not allow that one having no educated knowledge of the case should give any opinion upon it; only a specialist who had devoted his whole life to medical science was entitled to speak with authority. Up to this point the speaker was on fairly good ground; and we show our confidence in men thus qualified by putting our lives in their hands. Before long, however, the conversation turned

upon a religious question, and here again the physician was equally dogmatic. When it was pointed out that he had not made any study of theology, and that he was in no special sense a religious man, he confidently assumed that people are equally entitled to an opinion on questions of religious truth and experience. He who hardly gives five minutes' serious attention to the claims of the soul is to rank equally with those to whom the fear of God is a daily study and passion! Surely it is not difficult to see the fallacy of this; yet thousands fail to see it.

The patter of theorists of the order indicated expresses the astronomy of the blind. They attempt an exposition of a world outside their experience, and which, therefore, it is impossible for them to understand. A system of astronomy elaborated by the blind can possess little authority. They never marvelled at the sun going forth in his strength, nor at the moon walking in brightness; they never knew the pleasantness of the light; their heart never leaped to behold a rainbow in the sky; they never felt the grandeur of the starry night, the loveliness of the blue firmament, or the magic of a summer's morning. From hearsay they might construct a system of astronomy; yet, having never seen the heavenly bodies, and being practically unacquainted with telescope or spectroscope, it would hardly be accepted as a system by which to regulate the

clock, sow the seed, or sail the ship. Day and night, together with the magnificent revolution of the seasons, would be little more to them than periodical changes of temperature; and they could form only the obscurest notion of the source of light and beauty, the great dispenser of the seasons. The carnal know just about as much, or as little, of the spiritual universe. Mentally they inform themselves upon religious questions; in a vague way they feel around them another world, as in a vague way the blind are conscious of the sky, the sun, and the seasons; but, destitute of religious sincerity and sympathy, they are just as fit, or unfit, to pronounce on questions of the spiritual life as blind men are to set up as authorities on the phenomena of the heavens.

Our Lord repeatedly pressed this solemn truth upon the carnal theologians of His day: that through pride and worldliness they had become insensible to the pure and heavenly. Of the Pharisees He said: "Let them alone: they are blind guides." "Woe unto you, ye blind guides." "Ye fools and blind." Thus He continually characterises the men who aspire to become the religious teachers of their generation. These pseudo-guides could no longer see the face of God's heaven; and so they invented an orrery of their own in which the stars were placed and called by wrong names; a pretentious instrument

calculated only to mislead and shipwreck whoever trusted in it. Nothing more aroused our Lord's anger than this astronomy of the blind with its fatal consequences.

St. Paul repeatedly refers to this topic, but expressly so in the chapter before us. He declares that there is a divine wisdom which is not attained through the senses or by merely intellectual processes, but which is revealed by the Spirit. "The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God"; and only through this Spirit can men "know the things that are freely given to us by God." The sacred writer then goes on to argue that this spiritual, supernatural truth is revealed only to spiritual men. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, for they are spiritually judged." Olshausen comments on this passage: "So long as we remain carnal we cannot acknowledge what is divine, for the requisite organ is wanting in us. Not that any of us are without the faculty of spiritual perception that belongs essentially to our nature; but in the natural man it slumbers, only the animal life is awake." From time to time the Spirit arouses the dormant faculty, and we enjoy privileged hours of insight and appreciation; but carnality and unbelief blur our vision and exclude the dawning light. For purposes of experiment, naturalists blind the eyes

of caterpillars; in the process of the development of these creatures, however, the coverings to their eyes are changed four times over, on each occasion an opaque varnish being shed, so that they must just as often be re-blinded if the experiment of the scientist is to succeed. The eyes of the human heart are blinded and re-blinded as we permit the predominance of the carnal element in thought and life.

How entirely blind were the majority of the Jews to the moral grandeur of our Lord! They saw in Him no beauty that they should desire Him. "For had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." And ever since that period, the inability of the natural man to discern the glory of the Lord has found abundance of sorrowful illustration. Mr. Frederic Harrison, in his "Studies in Early Victorian Literature," deals with Carlyle's "Hero Worship" after this fashion: "The other strange delusion is the entire omission from the 'Hero as Priest' of any Catholic hero. Not only are St. Bernard and St. Francis, Becket and Lanfranc—all the martyrs and missionaries of Catholicism—consigned to oblivion; but not a word is said of Alfred, Godfrey, St. Louis, St. Ferdinand, and St. Stephen. In a single volume there must be selection of types. But the whole idea of Hero Worship was perverted in a plan which had no room for a single Catholic chief or

priest." Mr. Frederic Harrison is the eloquent apologist of Positivism, and as such he edited sympathetically "The New Calendar of Great Men," a work containing biographies of the worthies of all ages and nations included in the Positivist Calendar of Auguste Comte. May we not ask then, How did it come to pass that Comte found no place amid his five hundred and fifty-eight worthies for the Lord Jesus? Not, certainly, as a consequence of any excessive reverence, but simply from contempt. If Carlyle was the victim of a strange delusion in omitting from his catalogue a Catholic hero, and if this omission perverted his plan of "Hero Worship," what excuse will avail for Comte, who found no niche for the Catholics' Master amid the worthies of all ages and nations? Full of carnal prejudices, saturated by the secular temper, imprisoned within the temporal, the materialistic phiolsopher failed to recognize the incomparable glory of the Son of God. So tens of thousands in successive generations remain indifferent to the claims of the supreme One, because they are blinded by dust, choked with ashes, loaded with thick clay. "No man can say Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit."

How blind, too, are hosts of men to the high spiritual signification of the revelation of which our Lord is the centre and soul! That certain persons are unaccountably blind to the glories

of nature is matter of familiar knowledge and satire. Unthinkingly they set foot on sweetest flowers; they are deaf to the most enchanting minstrelsy; whilst the gorgeous pageants of sky and sea and summer fail to awake in them any sense of wonder or delight. But multitudes stray through revelation equally insensible to its great spiritual meanings. Sometimes they belittle and mock, like Renan commenting on the Israelites in the Wilderness. "Night-time is often chosen for a march, and in that case a lighted lantern, fastened on to the end of a long pole, is often used as a rallying-sign." So dwindles the pillar of fire into an oil-wick; "At Be'er, the discovery of a spring, by means of a divining-rod," caused the water to flow. So passes the wonder of the smitten rock! As to Sinai, "it was a kind of aurora borealis." So dies the glory of the Mount that burned with fire! And as to Jacob wrestling with the angel, what really happened was, the patriarch "fancied that some one was struggling with him in a nightmare."* So men of blurred vision go through revelation, as others go through nature, stripping away the poetry, the mystery, the spiritual and moral significance of history, prophecy, and symbol; giving to everything in the record a mean or burlesque interpretation.

* "History of Israel."

A primrose by a river's brim
A yellow primrose was to him,
And it was nothing more.

In other cases, where the literary charm of the book is granted, and its immense historical and intellectual merit extolled, its essential spiritual, saving import is often strangely ignored. Only whilst the Spirit interprets the word do we know the inmost truth of revelation, and the Spirit can thus interpret only to the sincere, sympathetic, and spiritually-minded.

Multitudes are unconscious of the highest truths, incapable of them. They lack a sense, the sublimest sense of all, the faculty to discern the reality of the divine and eternal. Clever enough in the arts of this life, they are stone-blind to the higher. Standing beneath the visible world patent to us all is an invisible under-world of atoms, ethers, colours, and subtle movements, which only the disciplined sense of the scientist can detect and measure; all around us is another world of beauty, music, and poetry, perceived and appreciated only by those possessed of the artistic sense; and, again, above us is a supreme world of which God is the everlasting light and glory, a realm evident only to those whose senses are exercised in holy thought, constant purity, and willing obedience.

How absurd the great beliefs, ideals, pleasures,

and hopes of the Christian faith appear to the natural man! "They are foolishness unto him." The vital doctrines appear veriest superstitions; the observances of worship as a waste of time; the life of restraint and discipline as a ridiculous missing of the only available pleasures. The whole Christian conception is voted unphilosophical, incredible, impracticable. "And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons-in-law, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for the Lord will destroy the city. But he seemed unto his sons-in-law as one that mocked." The carnal cannot judge, understand, or appreciate the spiritual doctrine, the heavenly law, the faith that discerns the invisible, the hope that lays hold of the unseen and everlasting. "He *cannot* know them."

Nor need we be surprised that this is so. To a certain extent the untrained mind cannot appreciate the facts and spirit of science. Not so long ago the *Times* newspaper contained a correspondence on the desirableness of science lecturers making their great themes more clear to the ordinary audience. In defence, the lecturers maintained that it is almost impossible to make lucid the problems of nature to listeners so entirely destitute of knowledge and sympathy as the majority are. More difficult still, then, is it for certain minds to grasp mathematical or metaphysical problems. How completely the ungifted

regard to the reality and blessedness of personal and undisciplined stand away from the mysteries of music! While Glinka was writing his immortal work, his wife complained before every one that "he was wasting ruled paper." The obtuse content themselves with the sarcasm that "music is a noise costlier than other noises." And as to the arts, the critics declare that genuine work is unintelligible to the crowd. "The beautiful is what your servant instinctively thinks is frightful." What, then, is the difficulty of bringing the children of this world—selfish, sensual, sceptical—to understand the obligations, pleasures, and hopes of a lofty spiritual faith! It is not simply difficult, it is impossible. It is true that revelation is in their hand; but what use is the telescope to a blind eye? Destitute of sincerity, seriousness, aspiration, they are without vision, without the vision that saves.

Let not Christian people be disconcerted when compelled to listen to clever men discoursing fluently against the verities which are so precious to the men of broken heart and contrite spirit. We say that the eye creates half that it sees: but no eye is nearly so creative as a blind one; and the proud critic, knowing nothing as he ought to know, enlarges copiously and confidently on his speculations. It is the astronomy of the blind. Competent on questions of the lower spheres, these talkers are of no account in

godliness. Their astronomy is the veriest superstition set forth in the language of philosophy. The least in the Kingdom of God is greater than these. Only men born again see the eternal light clearly and steadily. Only as we experience the truths divine do we comprehend them. Only as we do the will of God in daily obedience do we know the doctrine. As Carlyle puts it: "He who has done nothing has known nothing." Then do we see light in God's light, and know the secret of the world, of life, of the future when we believe in our heart and obey in our life.

That Thou art nowhere to be found, agree
Wise men, whose eyes are but for surfaces;
Men with eyes opened by the second birth,
To whom the seen, husk of the unseen is,
Descry the soul of everything on earth.
Who knows Thy ends, Thy means and motions see;
Eyes made for glory soon discover Thee.

III

EARTHLY AND HEAVENLY CLOUDS.

Yet He commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven.—Ps. lxxviii. 23.

I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins.—Isa. xliv. 22.

DEWAR in " The Faery Year " points out the striking difference that exists between the clouds of heaven and the fogs of earth. After describing the fullness of beauty in the forms and colours of the celestial clouds, the naturalist proceeds: " There is a cloud, however, that, contrary to cloud custom, has little metamorphosis. This is stratus, essentially the earth-cloud. The earth-cloud has none of the fantastic and quick-shifting imagery of sky-clouds, and even in the burn and flush of December sunsets takes on not a glint of gold light nor the faintest suffusion of colour. Look right into the yellow and deep rose in the west soon after four o'clock now, and this earth-cloud, hanging over the fiery screen, is cold and grey as ever. One might imagine it turned at such a time to a shower of gold dust. But it is impervious; nothing can illuminate it. Everything is

transformed and transcoloured in the beautiful light which seems to redeem everything from winter except this earth-cloud." Does not a similar difference and contrast exist between the shadows of life cast upon us by God and the sadness that we bring upon ourselves? Many of our sorrows are occasioned by our earthliness, faithlessness, and sinfulness, our fault and folly, whilst others are manifestly the act of God in the discipline of life; and it is well to distinguish between "the clouds commanded from above" and those gendered from beneath.

The glories of the clouds of winter and summer skies are not only the delight of poets and painters, but of all who possess even the least imagination and who give the sky merely a passing glance. Transformed and transcoloured in the beautiful light of the sun, the vapour becomes a vision splendid. He who commands "the clouds from above "makes of them" windows of heaven," through which shines light like unto jasper; "doors of heaven," through which stream upon the earth rain and fruitful seasons, filling the hearts of men with food and gladness. What in itself is dark and drear, is changed into an object of delight burdened with blessing. Is not this, then, equally true of those unwelcome providences which obscure the heavens and threaten to turn our day into darkness? Very wonderfully does the God of all grace gild the

cloud, converting it into a vehicle of illumination and refreshment. Each murky vapour invading our sky is made to wear its own livery of transfiguration and to drop upon the place beneath its own special blessing. Losses in fortune and influence, the bitter disappointments which disenchant us, the depressing seasons of sickness, the strain of perplexity, the dull monotonies of common life, the bereavements that blind us with tears, the inexplicable moods of melancholy haunting the soul, the weariness of age, the deepening shadows of mortality, all may become translucent, transmitting heaven's light, signals of mercy and promise, mediums of positive, precious, and everlasting blessing.

The cloud of God in the wilderness was a paradoxical one; it had a double function. "He spread a cloud for a covering; and fire to give light in the night." The sobering of the glare of days of health and success is often necessary if we are to see truly. The cloud that blots the blue lets us into the secrets of God, as astronomers in an eclipse learn the secrets of the sky. The disciples feared as they entered the cloud, but in it they beheld the glory of their Master as they had not seen it before. The cloud that envelopes us not rarely stimulates and freshens our whole spiritual life. "Like a clear heat upon herbs, and like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest," the sanctified sorrow descends upon the

soul refreshingly, when persistent sunshine would put it in peril. Again, the obnoxious event is transfigured by hope. "I have set My bow in the cloud." The clouds drawn up from the crystal sea and floating in the blue depths of the heavens never lack lustre and loveliness; nor do the mists and shadows which chasten the glare and gaiety of human life. Ruskin, extolling the clouds, remarks: "Not in her most ponderous and lightless masses will Nature ever leave us without some evidence of transmitted sunshine"; and, we may add, no darkness that gathers over the head of the saint is without its light and promise. Milton sings of "light which counterfeits a gloom"; the God of all grace, however, teaches the gloom to counterfeit a glory; nay, not to counterfeit, but to reflect on our tearful face a brightness beyond the brightness of the sun. As the vapours of the azure glow into crimson and purple, orange and rose, the whiteness of the driven snow and the radiance of dawn, distilling sweet rain and casting grateful shadows, so the storm-wrack and eclipses of life are ever being hallowed and beautified by grace, working out for the faithful results of infinite advantage.

We need not go far to see what rare character can be realised in severe situations. Not long ago a horticulturist called attention to the rich possibilities of "gardening in the shade." He

complained that a garden in the shade is usually not a garden at all, however many and delightful are the plants that would grow therein. But the conditions and possibilities of beds thus situated are rarely utilised to their full extent, or indeed utilised at all; the shaded portion of the majority of gardens being planted from year to year with a few excessively monotonous evergreens. But is it not exactly in the absence of the sun that the great Gardener of the Church effects His most dazzling and delightful triumphs? Many of His people spend years in the shade, in deep depths of shade, in bodily affliction, in stress of circumstance, in loneliness, in mental dejection and spiritual conflict; yet we behold in them not only the brave blossoms of purity, resignation, lowliness, patience, and fortitude, but a whole host of sweet-smelling and divinely-hued graces often supposed to be the exclusive offspring of the sun. God's garden in the shade is a parterre of the flowers of Paradise.

We need not fear "the clouds commanded from above"; they are like the clouds in some of the wonderful climates of the East—they have little gloom in them, they are soft and warm, their shadows full of shine. Big with mercy, and breaking with blessings on our head, are the clouds of God. "And I saw, and behold, a white cloud; and on the cloud I saw one sit-

ting like unto the Son of Man." "A white cloud"; peculiarly Christ's cloud.

How different is it with the earth-born clouds whose genesis is in our faithlessness, mistrust, and disobedience! Nothing, says the naturalist, can redeem the fog, the exhalation rising from the ground; it will not even in the burn and flush of sunsets take a glint of gold light nor the faintest suffusion of colour. Is it not thus with the sombre vapours which arise out of impurity of heart, worldly-mindedness, baseness of life? The choking fog generated on mud-banks of earthliness, the reek of unholy appetite, the miasma of sloth, the fume of care, the smoke of anger, the steamings of sloughs of despond, the black vapour of unbelief, the gaseous air of vanity, the effluvia of sensualism—these are foul emanations which no starlight can pierce nor sunshine gild, which open into no depths of blue, and upon which no rainbow can be painted.

Think of what these clouds *hide*. They first make it difficult, and then impossible, to see God. "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear." It is often thought that our failure to realise the fact and joy of the divine presence is purely intellectual: but it is more often the consequence of a vision blurred by carnal life. "The things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of

God," are also hidden by the dank and unclean airs of worldliness and license. High thoughts, enterprise, ideals, and inspirations are impossible to men who surrender themselves to a sordid life, as sunrises and sunsets are hidden by the black fogs of great cities. And the larger life which awaits us beyond the grave appeals very feebly, if at all, to those who suffer themselves to be immersed in temporal interests and satisfactions. Saints, the purest and most spiritual, see the golden city only through a mist; but living the grosser life we cease to see it at all. "For he that lacketh these things is blind, seeing only what is near, having forgotten the cleansing from his old sins." Oh, what a world of glorious things is hidden by earth-born clouds!

Think of what these clouds *blight*. We have spoken of the fact that the best in us will thrive even whilst our sky is sadly overcast, that it will marvellously spring and ripen in the shade. A German geologist, writing of the Arctic regions, tells how he found whole meadows full of flowers; he describes certain mountains as botanical gardens; and a slope that he discovered was completely covered with a violet-coloured carpet of rare blooms. But these miracles of floral triumphs in the teeth of vast darkness and savage frosts are utterly eclipsed by the sweet and sublime moral perfections which by divine grace are developed in sickness, neglect, want, toil, and

infinite pathos. It seems often as though God brought His last and highest work to its uttermost beauty exactly at the point where the shade of earth and the sunshine of eternity strangely mingle. On the other hand, all that is best in us is blighted and dwarfed as we submit to live in morbid and poisoned atmospheres. Here it is that parasites fasten upon us, that our forth-puttings of better desires and aspirations are chilled, that our greatness is dwarfed, our joyousness banished, and that a life which might have unfolded so gloriously resembles at length the ghostly plants which survive damp and darkness. The evaporations of low levels of life choke the soul that is being urged by the spirit to put on its beauty; the clouds of sin that intervene between us and heaven deny all the grand possibilities which are in us, all the grand possibilities which are before us.

Wallace dwells on the injurious effect of clouds and fogs in cutting off the sun's heat in certain climates and ages. The clouds and fogs reflect or absorb a large proportion of the sun-heat and prevent it reaching the surface of the earth; the result being that the cloudy atmosphere keeps large areas of land covered with snow and ice, which otherwise would be adorned with flowers and corn. The absence of sunshine occasions snow-storms, and in the height of summer there is a freezing temperature. The heat received

by Greenland from the sun, if none were cut off by the atmosphere, would cover the land with beauty and fruitfulness, whereas it is a desolate realm of ice and snow.* What shall we say of the self-caused clouds which intercept the sunshine of God's face, the fostering light and glory of the heavenly world? It is a serious thing that we should be cut off from the joy of the Lord. The murky atmosphere which arises out of the depths of a faithless soul enshrouds that soul, and keeps it in a perpetual winter of melancholy and barrenness, when it might be perfumed with roses, enlivened with music, and ring with the joy of harvest.

Think of what these clouds *threaten*. The films and fleeces "commanded from above" are full of promise; "the thick cloud" of our transgression is heavy with threatening and alarm. We do not need to be theologians to confess the reality of sin, and to become aware of the gulf that yawns between troubles of the conscience and the pain occasioned by the misfortunes of the natural life. We know within ourselves, we know as we scarcely know anything else, that the two experiences belong to entirely different worlds and carry infinitely disparate values. Lord Bacon apologises for himself: "You may know it was my fate, and not my folly, that brought me to it." Substitute Providence for

* "Island Life."

" fate," and then how light is the sorrow occasioned by the former position, compared with the anguish attending the latter. An instinctive fortitude is evoked by natural disaster, and after the first moments of consternation the soul is soothed by sympathy and hope; the conviction of moral failure, however, is a poisoned arrow that drinks up the spirit and inflicts overwhelming pangs and terrors. The consciousness of innocence inspires only serenity and boldness; free from the sense of blame we confront the sternest ordeal, knowing that God's blue hides no bolt; but folly and guilt bring in their train fierce vapours pregnant with thunder and lightning, storm, tempest, and irremediable shipwreck.

" Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me?" The answer to this query may often be sought in secret and forgotten faults. All faithlessness of spirit, disloyalty in conduct, shortcoming in character, contribute to darkness and apprehension; and there is no fault so subtle, or transgression so covert, but it hides some star, quenches some ray, casts on present and future some ominous shadow. We indulge no false thought, impure passion, secret unbelief; we permit no wandering of mind, heart, or life, without dimming the heavenly light. The infidelity of the soul to God is the dread eclipse, the cloud

that has no silver lining, the shadow of death in which there is no light at all.

Let me not, then, fear any cloud that God may send; it will only prove the background on which He will paint more vividly the rich imagery of His faithfulness and love; it means dew, showers, more abundant fruitfulness. Let my whole thought be to keep the shining heavens free from dust-clouds, fog of slime, the lurid smoke of passion's craters, the haze of doubt, the blackness of guilt. Just as the earth-cloud will not take on a glint of gold light nor the faintest suffusion of colour; so earthliness, wilfulness, indulgence, selfishness will not take on a sparkle of poetry, light of reason, nor faintest rainbow tint of hope. Sincere souls intuitively

> Know Heaven's truth from lies that shine.

Sophists in vain seek to invest sinful principles, passions, or acts with the charm of romance, the sanction of reason, the lustres of eloquence and poetry; the pure in heart detect and spurn the fraud.

> I saw the star supposed but fog o' the fen
> Gilded star-fashion by a glint from hell.

Sin is only exceeding sinful. Let it be my sole dread.

As the purging sun with burning beam con-

sumes the earth-cloud which would defile the sky; so may the forgiving God by the breath of His mouth and the brightness of His coming consume my sins, and leave me with open vision of the everlasting lights. And may He who remembers not past years, keep me day by day walking in the light, even as He is in the light.

Sun of my soul, Thou Saviour dear,
It is not night if Thou be near;
O may no earth-born cloud arise
To hide Thee from Thy servant's eyes!

IV

WHITE FUNERALS

The people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people.—EZRA iii. 13.

AMONG the aged men who saw the foundations of the new temple laid were probably some who had beheld the glory of the earlier building, the temple of Solomon; and the contrast filled them with sadness. A younger generation who had not seen the glory of the former house broke out into loud rejoicings to see the beginning of the new shrine. So among the multitude the cry of joy could not be distinguished from the noise of weeping. Life brings many events where the cry of joy mingles with the noise of weeping.

In an ode to a royal bridal pair, Tennyson describes the event as "the white funeral of the single life." At the first glance the bridal ceremony appears the very antithesis of a funeral, and so critics objected to the laureate's image; yet there is a good deal of reason in the poetic conceit. The bridal pair with mingled feelings bid adieu to the single life; for whatever may be the joy of the hour, there is real pathos in

forsaking the home of one's youth, and in practically sundering the most intimate and tender associations. When the guests for a moment indulge in reflection, and think of all the chance and change the event implies, they too will be conscious of contradictory emotions, and hardly know whether to laugh or cry. The soul, alive to the crisis, discerns the undertones of a dirge in the wedding-bells, and the gayest and saddest sentiments mingle, mock, and mystify. Neither altogether bright nor altogether dark, but partaking of the quality of both, the marriage service is not inaptly designated a "white funeral."

There are, however, many events in life in which the shout of joy mingles with the noise of weeping. We celebrate funerals of this order all along the way. With mixed feelings our infancy is buried. The child knows little, if anything, of the grief; but with sincere regret the father and mother see the Hours carry forth the fairy life from the nursery to hide it in the mould of years. The day we leave our mother is fraught with fate. It is not long before we bury our youth. The days of boyhood and girlhood glide softly away with their poetry, romance, and light-heartedness; the colours fairer than spring are sobered, the elusive sweetness of the virgin rose is gone. Dying out of the schoolroom into the big world is usually a welcome transition to the party most interested, yet

not without solicitude; the flowers of congratulation and hope do not altogether hide the bier on which are silently borne away youth's loveliness and dream. Not far off now is the funeral of the single life, in whose grave so much is buried; a hesitating pageant in which the bouquets are also wreaths. Often may we cry with our great poet:

Thou may'st see a sunshine and a hail in me at once.

Finally, we bury our manhood. With swift shuttle Time weaves the shroud that softly veils the brightness of the eyes, the energy of the limbs, the comeliness of the form; and the feet of the young men anxious to take our place are heard impatiently shuffling at the door. The last gloomy interment in the cemetery is pretty liberally rehearsed in a succession of obsequies sufficiently pathetic.

Happy are we if the successive deaths are also glorious resurrections! With some, alas! life is far from being at every stage a felicitous development. The naturalist tells us of creatures which are all free when they first quit the egg; they frisk, they swim with the rapidity of lightning; and yet at the close of life they are corpulent, blind, impotent, legless cripples, their existence being more precarious than that of those miserable mutilated beings sometimes found in

our cities. In their youth they have a supple and elegant body, and the gracefulness of the postures which they assume does not yield in beauty to those of the most brilliant insects; yet when they have become adult we find them frightfully deformed, as though a foul leprosy had atrophied within them all the organs which served as a means of communication with the outer world. What a picture this supplies of the degeneration that we witness so frequently in our fellow men! The sprightly child fading into a foolish youth; an anxious adolescence succeeded by a debased manhood; a debauched career rounded off by dishonoured years. Each death marked by unavailing regrets, and followed by a resurrection to shame and contempt. The whole thing is more like the reading of the funeral service at the scaffold and the burial under a prison flagstone than a white funeral which buries one age with pleasant thoughts to see it emerge again in rarer strength and beauty. It is a serious thing to mar one passage of this wonderful life. In nature some creatures have a progressive development at first, a recurrent one afterwards, and then again it becomes progressive. Nature may thus best compass her ends; but certainly in human life each stage must be completed with faithfulness and success, if the final issue is to be the fullness of glory, honour, immortality, and eternal life.

When the Old Year is being gathered to the vast mysterious necropolis in which its countless predecessors sleep, it is our privilege to celebrate its passing with a white funeral. We throng about the opened grave like wedding-guests, we bring flowers, spread feasts, sing carols, exchange congratulations; for whatever our fortune through the year we have the consciousness at its close that life brings us good, and not evil. We have been dowered with ten thousand mercies in worldly blessing. Heaven has watched over our higher life; for if we attend the funeral of the dead year in white raiment, it is because divine grace kept it white. And if sad seasons have sprinkled the calendar, nay if they have darkened all the moons, we cannot be forgetful of the ever-unchangeable Friend who has whispered fresh secrets in our ears, insinuated seasonable strength into our heart, and relieved cheerless hours by sweet rays of hope. We are justified in celebrating the funeral of the dead year with songs, and in planting on its grave pleasant flowers of memory. Yet the passing of the Old Year is to many literally a funeral, a dark funeral only. What grievous blows it has dealt! What irretrievable losses it has inflicted! What loved faces it has withdrawn into the dark! Time cannot pass without bringing painful change and deprivation; and thousands finish the year poorer than they ever feared, more

lonely than they ever dreamed, and with the summertide of things changed into a bitter winter of disenchantment and discontent.

Yet in spite of dwindling life and incessant sorrow, the shout of joy drowns the noise of the weeping of the people. Very wonderfully do we set time at defiance; and whatever may be the trouble of the world, hope triumphs over it, never bating a jot. It is almost impossible for us to take mortality seriously. God has set eternity in our heart, and the clock is never more considered than as a box of tricks. We go gliding down the stream, and are perfectly aware of the Niagara that awaits us a little farther down; but that does not prevent our passing the successive landmarks with hilarious shouts. The French have what they call "*la religion des souvenirs*"; and, indeed, joyously to recall the succession of the years is a universal religion. How conscious we are of our immortality, and that we are born for glory and gladness! White is our native dress, and we bury the years in flower-lined graves.

"On stepping-stones of our dead selves we rise to higher things." This is the ideal pathway. We have just remarked how some lives register only successive depreciations of spirit and character; they descend on the stepping-stones of their dead selves, right down to the veritable charnel-house of hopeless old age.

They murder their youth by excess, they cremate it in passion, and henceforth play the part of chief mourner, as through the years one fraction after another of their great personality is coffined. Walter Savage Landor justly notes: "There is no funeral so sad to follow as the funeral of our own youth, which we have been pampering with fond desires and ambitious hopes." If, however, we act wisely through life's successive stages, each death shall betoken a glorious resurrection. The day of our conversion celebrates a white funeral. A day of tears, yet one of infinite jubilation. We awake from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, henceforth walking in a life that is perennially new, fresh, richer, and more complete. We die daily that we may perpetually awake to a finer, deeper, larger experience of the things of God. "Wherefore we faint not; but though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day."

"But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, He that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall quicken also your mortal bodies through His Spirit that dwelleth in you." There are distinct stages of spiritual life, as many and as marked as the seven ages of mortal man; and these all are purifications, upliftings, beatifications: in the spiritual life, however, the seventh stage being

eternal perfection. Every white funeral, every change of life, every anniversary, every lapse of time we mark or celebrate, ought to be attended by a spiritual development, a resurrection of the soul, an exaltation of character. The wonderful process must go on evermore: expiring childhood emerging in noble youth, which is a diviner thing than innocent infancy; the shed blossom of youth setting into the precious fruit of manhood; the burial of the single life completing the life of strength and felicity; whilst manhood, ripening into age, brings the fruition and glorification of nature's highest powers. On "the stepping-stones of our dead selves," ought we to climb to our highest self, which is Christ Jesus the Lord.

This process of perpetual dying, which is yet true life, is attended by peculiar conflicts, renunciations, and sorrows, but the essence of it is peace and delightsomeness. "I know that no man hath a velvet cross," writes Rutherford; "but the *inside* of Christ's cross is white and joyful, and to the far end of the black cross Christ hath fastened a fair and glorious Heaven. Who so looketh to the white side of Christ's cross, and takes it up cannily with faith and courage, shall find it such a burden as sails are to a ship, or wings to a bird. It is but our weak and dim eyes that look to the black side. . . . My Lord hath made my cross as if it were all

crystal, so that I can see through it Christ's fair Face and Heaven."

The last interment in the cemetery is another scene where the noise of the shout of joy strangely mingles with the weeping of the people. The godly life which is a series of progressive enhancements ends with a triumph which explains all that has gone before, which crowns all that has gone before. The Master had a white funeral. "And entering into the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, arrayed in a white robe." And that robe "white as snow" was a figure of the mighty radiant elements which lighted the tragedy of Calvary. The blessed dead who die in the Lord share with Him in the glory and hope of the resurrection unto life eternal. Very often, as we have seen, do the sweet and bitter mingle perplexingly; but in the churchyard this ambiguous experience becomes most acute and baffling. Travellers tell us of fruits of the wilderness "which taste bitter and sweet, a strange concentrated essence of the tropics"; and so after years of acquaintance with commingling sweets and bitters, we come to the graveyard, the borderland, where we taste the concentrated essence of the contrasted problems of sin and redemption, the anguish of death and the rapture of immortality, the consciousness that all is won in the very event and moment in which all is lost.

George Sand writes, "I felt twenty years younger on the day that I buried my youth." She felt no sadness in the transition; only the sense of a truer wisdom, a serener peace, a completer liberty, an expanding horizon. But if the burial of one's youth may become such an emancipation, how much younger shall we feel on the day that we bury our age! What shall be the glory and joy of the final emancipation when our friends bury us, and this corruptible puts on incorruption, this mortal immortality! Our Master dared not to tell us more, lest we should have been overweighted with the vision. All golden weddings and diamond jubilees only faintly foreshadow the sweet release, the full felicity. Do we believe our creed? The very magnificence of the Christian hope is sometimes felt by us as a difficulty, we are tempted to think it too grand to be true. Rather is it too grand to be false. Think of our hope in the light of creation! If the evolution of ages culminates in humanity, nothing except a great destiny for the race will justify the mighty expense. Think of our hope in the light of redemption! Only as a splendid destiny awaits those for whom Christ died is the cross justified. Let us confidently believe, looking for the coming of the Lord Jesus unto eternal life. If all through life we proceed from grace to grace, we surely have nothing to fear in its ending. Transfiguring gleams from

the opening heavens will gild that last funeral, palms hide the willows, and joy break through the swimming eyes of the mourners; it shall be the whitest of white funerals, as it is in sure and certain hope of resurrection to eternal life.

And when grim Death doth take me by the throat,
  Thou wilt have pity on Thy handiwork;
Thou wilt not let him on my suffering gloat,
  But draw my soul out—gladder than man or boy,
When Thy saved creatures from the narrow ark
  Rushed out, and leaped and laughed and cried for joy,
And the great rainbow strode across the dark.

V

THE CASUISTRY OF LOVE

And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment; so that ye may approve the things that are excellent (prove the things that differ—Margin).—PHIL. i. 9, 10.

"ON the whole," writes Charles Henry Pearson, "though we no longer possess the institution of a 'scruple-shop,' as Cavalier undergraduates profanely called the conference which used to meet at Oxford under the Protector to discuss cases of conscience, it cannot be said that the occupation of the casuist is altogether gone."* It certainly has not altogether gone; the complexities of civilisation, ever increasing in number and delicacy, rather multiply than diminish the fine points which torture sensitive consciences. It is usually assumed that such scruples can be settled only by acute intellectual perception and reasoning; and all will acknowledge that a brain disciplined on legal lines is most likely to determine justly many of the debatable questions which are far more than simply curious. But many problems arising from conflicting duties cannot thus be solved.

* "Reviews and Essays."

Mental acumen and logic fail to satisfy as to the verdict at which we should arrive or the course we ought to follow. As Pearson acknowledges, "The ethics of ordinary life are not always adequate for the demands of a great emergency." The text suggests another dissolver of doubts.

The apostle recognises as a great truth that love is logical, that it possesses rare clearness of perception and accuracy of judgment in regard to doubtful points of character and duty; he who abounds in love is competent to distinguish things that differ, and will approve those that are excellent. As just remarked, it is usually assumed that fine discriminations in matters of character and conduct are made chiefly by an educated intellectual sense; and it is also often assumed that emotion of any kind is prejudical to insight and definition; but the text implies, on the contrary, that love is clear sighted—judging, choosing, rejecting, with special delicacy and authority. So far from a pure and kindled soul being necessarily more or less erratic, its findings on all matters of obligation must be regarded as singularly trustworthy. The scientist reminds us that "no animal that we know of combines a highly-developed brain with cold blood." On the strength of the text we may dare affirm that no persons combine the highest moral sense with cold blood. Pure, warm feeling is essential to the highly-developed conscience, as to the highly-

developed brain. A heart pulsating with the love of God and mankind is the express organ for determining the problems of duty which life never fails to bring.

The Old Testament recognises that piety is the indispensable qualification for refined calculation. How strikingly this is expressed in the opening of the Book of Proverbs! "The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, King of Israel: to know wisdom and instruction; to discern the words of understanding; to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness and judgment and equity; to give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion: that the wise man may hear, and increase in learning; and that the man of understanding may attain unto sound counsels: to understand a proverb, and a figure; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge," or the chief part of knowledge. He must be a good man who undertakes to understand this book. The fear of Jehovah is the main condition of the knowledge of intricate things. This idea pervades the whole of the Old Testament writers—that spirituality is essential to true perception, that godliness carries with it insight, discrimination, all that the nations outside knew as philosophy.

In the New Testament the same idea prevails; only now piety is denoted by the name of love,

rather than by that of wisdom. How entirely the immortal description of love given by St. Paul in the thirteenth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians bears out our estimate of the value of love as a counsellor!

Love is long-forbearing, is all kindness:
Love knows not jealousy.
Love does not parade her gifts, swells not with self-conceit, she flouts not decency;
She grasps not at her rights, refuses to take offence, has no memory for injuries.
She exults not over wrong triumphant, she shows glad sympathy with Truth.
All tolerance is she, all trustfulness, all hope, all strong endurance.*

Love here stands in direct antithesis to mere knowledge and philosophy, a competent and incomparable guide to nobleness of character, to seemliness of behaviour. The judgment is deranged by anger, jealousy, vanity, selfishness, intolerance, suspicion, and appetite; but these blinding and discolouring passions are purged by love, which inspires humility, patience, reverence, and hope, thus giving a clear sense of what is right, fitting, and lovely in conduct, even where the social situation is most puzzling and the dilemmas of duty demand more than the wisdom of Solomon. The disturbing elements of temper

* Dr. Arthur S. Way, "The Letters of St. Paul."

and desire occasion bad moral judgment and prompt unbecoming conduct generally; but as the affections are purified the sound mind asserts itself, and we walk in the light of life. We can hardly wrong whom we love with a pure and enlightened affection.

In other spheres the large part played by intense and lofty feeling is very evident. All art is an interpretation of life on the emotional side; the most splendid work of genius is the expression of pure sensibility. The artist should not neglect general culture; yet it is clearly apparent that his grandest achievements owe far more to exalted emotion than to any technical knowledge of rhythm, colour, or sound. The most knotty problems of music, painting, and eloquence are solved in strong souls fired with the love of the ideal. This is still more true in morals. In the abounding of divine and human love we discern and appreciate the inmost truths of life and duty. It is, of course, right and necessary that devout men study righteousness on its intellectual side; yet it remains true that the loving heart of the child is often more trustworthy on matters of conduct than the aching brain of the philosopher. The lover of God and man is the authoritative analyst of perplexing moments and situations; and no alembic can more infallibly distinguish the things which differ, and more obviously reveal the gold and convict the dross,

than a pure heart white hot in the flame of love.

It is impossible to overrate the significance of this holy fire in testing the character of competing qualities and motives, and in constraining those who cherish it into a right course of action. A wholly honest and kindly heart is in the most ambiguous moments and complicated relations of human life what the barometer is to the traveller in unexplored regions, what a perfect lens is to the astronomer peering into misty depths, or what vibrating antennæ are to creatures feeling along dim and perilous places—the vital condition of lucidity, precision, and safety. It is by the interpretation of life on the emotional side that the delicate questions of domestic life are happily settled, not by reason; it is by the interpretation of life on the emotional side that the intricate mutual rights of the community are ascertained, by the criticism of the philanthropic sentiment, and not by political or social economy; and it is by the interpretation of life on the emotional side, that is by the action of love and sacrifice, that universal peace and brotherhood are being established, not by statesmanship or philosophy. A pure and generous heart discovers the shortest and truest method for the solution of all our problems, even the darkest and most painful; such a heart is more than an organ of fine feeling, it is also the clearest brain and the most exquisite conscience.

Is not the illuminating and guiding power of love continually being exemplified in the perfection of conduct witnessed in the most illiterate persons? Their correctness and refinement often surprise us. That they transgress the rules of fashionable society and stumble in the arbitrary etiquette of the rich and great, is of no consequence whatever; in daily life their propriety and courtliness are most impressive, and they manifest a subtle, genuine grace commonly lacking in the enforced ceremonies of the opulent and cultured. The dove or gazelle is essentially elegant, and its every movement graceful; and we know homely persons who remind us of these delightful creatures: they are becoming and charming in whatever they say or do. As genius works out with perfect unconsciousness the complicated technique of art, so love enables those who never studied in any school of etiquette to follow without tripping the whole programme of noble behaviour. Gentleness, lowliness, patience, and unselfishness constitute the soul of true deportment. We speak of "tact," yet what is tact but another name for love, and what is akin to love? We speak of "taste," yet what is true taste but admiration, reverence, and love? And not in matters of simple behaviour only, but in the very highest ranges of duty do the illiterate act with a precision and delicacy of obedience that may well satisfy and delight the

sternest moralist; they know nothing of the science of ethics, and yet since their heart is full of the love of God and their neighbour they seem never to fail in actual life and conduct. John B. Crozier remarks that "poetic intuition is of more weight than a whole catalogue of merely intellectual reasons, and is the highest test of truth. In the moral life the intuitions of love are still more authoritative and precious, as we perceive in those choice characters who have never known any scholastic or social education whatever.

The Bible is a vast code of laws for the regulation of human life; but it is simply impossible that we can retain all its maxims, statutes, and commandments in our memory. We may well feel a sense of despair when we think of remembering and applying the laws and precepts of revelation through the intellect. How full is Deuteronomy of noble instructions and admonitions! In the Book of Proverbs what a vast storehouse of wisdom! Its multitude of injunctions seem as comprehensive and many-coloured as life itself; yet the most retentive mind cannot hold these so as to be prepared with the specific counsel at the critical moment. The New Testament teems with sayings, beatitudes, and commandments; but it is impossible that we should always be able to recall the express instruction for sudden exigencies. We are bewildered by

the multiplicity, as when looking at the stars. What then? "Love is the fulfilling of the law." It is the polar star; and true to it, we are true to the whole heaven. The pure heart possesses an indefinable intuition by which we recognise and obey these manifold maxims and laws without perhaps recalling them individually or specifically at all. Such a heart contains within itself the essence of the whole code of righteousness; it is an encyclopædia of universal duty. Love's divine simplicity is the most complex of facts. We leave the maze of bewildering details to find that in the illumination and power of a pure master passion we are keeping the law down to its last jot and tittle. "Out of the heart are the issues of life."

In thus extolling love we must remember what exactly were the nature and working of the love to which so much was trusted. All that goes by that name is not the genuine passion vindicated by the New Testament. There is a love that lacks spirituality, and against this we are warned. Epaphras "declared unto us your love in the Spirit" (Col. i. 8). The love of the Colossian Christians was one kindled by the Holy Ghost, and therefore distinguished from mere natural love. It is the love that has been awakened in them through the preaching of the gospel, which has regard first of all to the Lord, but then along with Him to all that belongs to Him and to His

service.* How often, when this fact has been forgotten, has the thought of love degenerated into carnal, base passion, dishonouring and destroying the Church of God! There is a love that ignores righteousness, and against this our text protests. Michelet writes: "The Stoic ideal, as stated by Zeno: 'Love is the safety of the commonwealth!' But, oh! how vague and obscure this word 'Love' is! Love without Justice, love of caprice and favouritism may become a hell, the scourge of the commonwealth, and *by no means its safety.*" In the Christian conception, justice is an essential element of love. "We do not cease to pray and make request for you, that ye may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work" (Col. i. 9, 10). Nothing vague, obscure, or capricious here. It is a demand for righteousness throughout the whole sphere of activity. Love in the New Testament is the fulfilling of the law, not its neglect or denial. It is a spiritual passion directed to ends of universal truth, justice, and purity. There is a love that disregards knowledge, blindly following its impulses; and against such emotionalism our text is a protest. "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment; so

* Olshausen.

that ye may approve the things that are excellent." St. Paul prays that their love may become rich in knowledge, that they may have a right spiritual perception, and so be able to discriminate between right and wrong in daily life. They are not to become the sport of every impulse of the heart, but to possess a true practical knowledge of God and of His holy will. The cynical proverb cries, "Love is blind," noting its habitual disregard of rational courses; but the divine love shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit is an eye of fire piercing to the eternal truth and reason of things.

If our love is of this high quality, spiritual, holy, wise, we become skilful casuists indeed, determining truly the problems of duty and preserving our integrity in life's most confusing maze. Thus endowed we need not fear. Full of celestial light, and with a personality tremblingly sensitive to the eternal righteousness,

> Unswerving shall we move as if impelled
> By strict necessity along the path
> Of order and of good.

VI

ELECT INSTRUMENTS

He hath made me a polished shaft, in His quiver hath He kept me close: and He said unto me, Thou art My servant; Israel, in whom I will be glorified.—Isa. xlix. 2, 3.

THE Jewish nation was an instrument shaped by the divine hand, fitted for the divine purpose. Israel, as an entire nation, is the servant of Jehovah; and just as it was faithful to its calling, God's counsels of love were carried out, He was glorified in and by it. What can be thus true of a nation may be equally true of the individual. Each man, if he only realise his calling, is an instrument of God, fashioned by His wisdom and love for the execution of His holy purpose. How this view exalts the whole conception of human life! We are not shapeless and purposeless things equally in place anywhere, but highly-wrought tools fitted for special tasks and definite ends. At the back of all stands One who accomplishes the purpose of His own will; and it is our glory to know ourselves His instruments, consciously and lovingly facilitating and fulfilling the eternal purpose. Much is suggested here concerning the

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instruments approved by God and rendered effective through Him.

Fitness is the first mark of His election. The idea of suitability for office and mission is prominent in the Old Testament. The great leaders of Israel, her famous prophets, priests, and kings, were chosen on the grounds of their special genius and ability. Priests like Samuel, kings like Saul and David, prophets like Elijah and many others, were not taken by routine from privileged circles, but elected from unlikely quarters because Heaven discerned in them qualities of promise. The same truth is conspicuous in the New Testament. We cannot believe that the disciples of our Lord were arbitrarily or accidentally associated with Him, that the whole relation was a matter of promiscuousness. The Master deliberately selected and nominated the apostles; He penetrated their constitution, knew their temperament, appraised their gifts, and sent them forth to effectuate His vast purpose of redeeming love. "I know whom I have chosen." "Ye did not choose Me, but I chose you." St. Paul, too, was no accident, not an ordinary person thrust by chance into a great situation. "But when it was the good pleasure of God, who separated me, even from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles." "But the Lord said unto Ananias, Go

thy way; for he is a chosen vessel unto Me." His unique natural endowments determined his election. We believe that this selection ever proceeds in the Church of God. "But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it has pleased Him"; and whether the appointment be to this office or that, exquisite adjustment is secured between the natural powers and the spiritual calling. The kingdoms of nature and spirit blend perfectly, and the great Potter who fashions an infinite variety of vessels knows exactly their destination in the temples of His grace.

Nor must we confine our view to the ecclesiastical circle and the spiritual vocation, the same distinguishing grace extends to the worldly sphere and its ministers. In his great works, Alfred Russel Wallace maintains with abundant illustration that nature is "the fore-ordained method of a supreme mind"; that, look where you will, there are "the proofs of an organising and directive life-principle." But if design and direction thus obtained in the material realm, can we believe that society is a predetermined chaos? We know it cannot be so. To every man is assigned a sphere according to his several ability. Each shaft in God's quiver is fitted for its quarry, and He cannot err in its selection. The mechanic, builder, or artist does not employ the first tool that comes to hand and muddle

through as best he may; he selects the most likely instrument available for the accomplishment of his design. We cannot doubt it is thus with the God of law and harmony in that providence which He exercises over us. The ideal of the government which embraces us all is the fitness of the worker for his task, of the task to the worker; and we can only believe that the adjustment between the instrument and its destination is most complete and exquisite so far as the supreme Dispenser is concerned. The perfect adaptations of nature can only be a figure of the harmonies established between the highest beings and their ministries. The pathetic misfits between talents and callings which disfigure and distress society must be debited to human ignorance and carelessness, and not to the act of God.

This divine destination, too, is as real in the case of the humblest as of the highest. We are disposed to recognise the shaping hand of God in the allocations and stewardships of the ten-talented, whilst we are slow to see any election at all in the lowlier servants of humanity. There is no difference. Theorists have been of opinion that the quality of sound special to each musical instrument is affected by the nature of the substance through which the tones are sounded, but practical men question this. A firm of Belgian cornet-makers conducted a series of experiments which showed that cornets, scientifically made of

wood, brass, copper, iron, or other materials, all sounded alike, provided only that the bores were identical in every particular. Thus as a given instrument sounds alike whether made of wood or iron, copper or gold; so we may well believe that man, rich or poor, cultured or illiterate, high or low, is an equally fitting organ for the expression of the divine mind, an equally effective instrument in the divine hand; always providing that in mind, conscience, and heart he agrees with the holy character of Him who makes the music, and whose vessel he is. The very humblest among us may justly regard himself as a polished shaft in God's quiver, ordained to noble and glorious uses. How anxious, then, ought we to be that we may fulfil the heavenly design! How sensitive and responsive to the divine touch! How self-will should be suppressed lest it blind us to our true calling! How nobly humble and proudly acquiescent ought we to be, knowing that, if we are found where God placed us, we are royally placed indeed! "Thou art My servant; thou art Israel, in whom I glorify Myself." Here is our consolation and inspiration whatever may be the nature of our work, the grade of our social standing, the place of our habitation. Any casual stick is not good enough for God; His instruments are calculated, discriminated, directed; and it ought to be our

first anxious business to find our sphere and mission.

Perfectness is another mark of God's elect instruments. "He hath made me a polished shaft." Sharp and shining are His arrows; when His instruments reach His thought, they are the best of their kind. It is a fashion to believe that the inferiority of instrumentality is quite immaterial to God, that He accomplishes His purpose by roughest agents and crudest tools equally with the most finished; any hedge-stake or besom-shaft will do, and do all the better for being rough-hewn. We must be careful how we conclude from appearances that God is indifferent to the mediums through which He expresses Himself, or that He is careless concerning the vessels by which He seeks to accomplish His purpose. Supreme masters rich in invention and skill can on occasion do marvellously with scanty and rude implements; but we are assured that usually the accomplished artist is most fastidious about his tools: the bungling beginner can bungle with anything, but the master of any craft is exacting touching his ministerial aids. A collector recently brought together the palettes of a considerable number of distinguished painters, and maintained that these colour-boards revealed the partialities and discriminations of their illustrious manipulators. Paganini was specially particular about his violin; and the great masters

of music usually reveal the same niceness. Astronomers and scientists generally are difficult to please with lenses, balances, and meters—they seek the most delicate mechanism available for their purpose. Tools of exceptional precision are demanded to match the fineness of the worker's thought, the perfection of his ideal. And even in the rougher work-a-day world the shrewd sailor insists on the lines of his boat, the husbandman on the shape of his plough. We may be sure that all this human solicitude concerning instruments only dimly represents the demands of Him who is wise in counsel and excellent in working. He uses imperfection to high effect, conveys unsearchable treasure through earthen vessels; nevertheless such instruments as are at their best most become His hand, the most effectually reveal His glory. Many "rough diamonds" are among His jewels; yet we fully believe that there is no sacredness in roughness, nor has it any permanent place in His Kingdom.

Lest we be misunderstood, let us reassert that God's greatly honoured servants are not rarely modest instruments falling far short of the canons of worldly and intellectual culture. Yet moral and spiritual fitness may exist whilst much is wanting to satisfy the connoisseurship of this world. Visitors to the Tate Gallery see with surprise the paint-box of Turner—a battered receptacle of apparently dirty pigments. It

could never be associated with the vases of drawing-rooms or the jewelled treasures of nobles. The marine store-dealer would scorn it. Yet how well it served its famous owner and bodied forth his wonderful visions! However rude in aspect, it was really all the artist needed to give expression to his sense of the truth and poetry of nature. Rainbows sprang out of it; from it unrolled new skies of mystery and magnificence; suns arose out of it apparelled in celestial light and set in golden glory; it widened into sounding seas, it became the fountain of majestic rivers, whilst its prismatic exhalations expanded into classic cities, paradisal scenes, infinite horizons. Though that mean colour-box had been a golden casket sparkling with gems, it could not have added one iota to the glory of its creations. Thousands of Heaven's servants are as potsherds in the sight of the dilettante; yet such is their moral content, their spiritual potency, that they prove mighty through God for effects of unsurpassable moral beauty and grandeur. Lacking in attributes of secondary value, they still possess the supreme endowments of the soul, faith in God and love to man, and so become workmen needing not to be ashamed. At last it is the truth of the aim, the straightness and impetus that give the arrow its efficacy. In the absence of the wise, mighty, and noble, God chose the foolish things of the world, the weak,

the base, and the things that are not, that no flesh should glory before Him and that His redeeming purpose should be achieved.

Yet the obligation remains that we make the best of ourselves for His sake. We must bring every faculty to perfection that He may best express Himself through us. Christians have a special reason for cultivating every gift of body, intellect, utterance, and behaviour to the last possibility of power and refinement; we are organs of God, weapons in His armoury, vessels in His laboratory, instruments in His hand. "They are the messengers of the churches, they are the glory of Christ." Gregory Nazianzen often writes of the ardour which filled his mind, even in his boyish days, to master the different branches of knowledge, chiefly that he might lay its treasures at the feet of Christ, and turn the weapons it furnished against those who taunted the Christians with ignorance. So ought we to make the best of ourselves, to cultivate our faculties, to increase in knowledge and power, to improve every gift of our stewardship, that we may lay all our treasure at the feet of our Master and turn our burnished weapons against the alien host. Nothing for ostentation, but everything for efficiency. An arrow is none the better being feathered with a peacock's plume; a sword smites no more effectually because of jewelled hilt or blazoned blade; a trumpet stirs the blood

no more for its golden tassel; and we need not study pride or show. But whatever makes for the perfection of our powers let us earnestly cultivate and steadily pursue. If God can on occasion use us for good despite our imperfection, better still can He use us with our talents in their integrity. "Generally speaking, art is more true than that which is not art," writes Vinet. Wise education brings us nearer God's ideal, and qualifies us more eminently for His service. "Tools attain to beauty by force of being fit"; and human nature reaches its utmost glory as it becomes most fit for the grand task of glorifying God in the service of humanity.

Sanctity is the last mark of the instrument honoured of God. A polished shaft denotes a cleansed agent. This indeed is the imperative condition of acceptance and efficiency. "Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some unto honour, and some unto dishonour. If a man, therefore, purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, meet for the master's use, prepared unto every good work." The apostle does not teach that a man's position is determined by his natural gifts—the richly endowed being golden vessels elected to honour, whilst the lesser-gifted are vessels of wood and earth relegated to subservient ministries. His point is that everything is determined

by purity. He who has purged himself from the lusts of the flesh and the world is a vessel of gold or silver whatever his natural talents may be, a vessel unto honour, meet for the Master's use; whilst he who retains the taint of evil is wood or earth, a vessel unto dishonour, however brilliant his natural gifts. Purity determines efficiency. The instrument is qualified as it is clean or unclean. The lack of spirituality and holiness means a defective stop in the organ, a loose string in the harp, a muddy spot on the palette, a twist in the arrow, a blunter edge to the axe, a fault marring the efficacy of what would otherwise be a choice instrument.

That moral excellence is a condition of efficacy in the highest things is a truth perceived in spheres outside the Church. Did not Milton assure us that the poet must first be a good man? In one of his letters to the Lady Harriet Don, Burns writes concerning his engagement in the Excise, "One advantage I have in this new business is the knowledge it gives me of the various shades of character in man—consequently assisting me in my trade as a poet." It was rather thus in the line of sensual indulgence that his finest senses were blurred and the poet degraded in the man. Ruskin steadily taught that the first qualification for great art was to look on foulness with horror. Professor Tyndall insisted that character, no less than mind of the highest

order, must distinguish the successful researcher. After recounting the discoveries of Berzelius, Regnault, and Joule, he adds, "There is a morality brought to bear upon such matters, which, in point or severity, is probably without a parallel in any other domain of intellectual action." To the same effect Novalis wrote long before: "Let him, therefore, who would arrive at a knowledge of Nature, train his moral sense; let him act and conceive in accordance with the noble essence of his soul; and, as if of herself, Nature will become open to him." Blessed are the pure, for they see deepest and surest, they see the best of everything, and give the best report of it; and thus being and doing best serve their race. What, then, intellectual observers see with more or less clearness and maintain with more or less emphasis, revelation discerns with open vision and affirms with absolute assurance, that the highest and most effective servants of humanity are the pure in heart, the good, the true, the loving, the spiritual and godly, in a word, the Christlike. In such men God is revealed and glorified. Great men raise our conception of man; good men raise our conception of God. He is magnified in them.

VII

VITAL VERITIES

O Lord, by these things men live, and wholly therein is the life of my spirit.—Isa. xxxviii. 16.

IN the thought of Hezekiah, the things by which "men live" are the consciousness of God and the recognition of His gracious words and acts. Here is the inmost and highest source of life: "wholly therein is the life of my spirit." Moses gives expression to the same thought: "And He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by everything that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live." Recognising the living God, and delighting in His manifestations of power, wisdom, and love, our inmost nature is satisfied.

We ever need to watch lest we occupy ourselves with what is secondary and superficial whilst we neglect the profound and essential. There are things in which the senses live, things wherein the spirit lives, and we need caution lest we attempt to satisfy the spirit with the objects

of sense. Many scenes and interests which appeal to sense, intellect and sentiment are engaging and lovely; but they must not be mistaken for the essential things. A proverb reminds the Oriental that "The lotus-flowers are not the Nile." The flowers are beautiful as they fringe the river or shine on its bosom, but they are not the river; they satisfy no thirst, they water no fields, they are charming, but they are not the Nile. Thus we ever need to distinguish between the admirable and the essential; between the things that only adorn life and the things that create and nourish it.

We may with advantage remember this *in the contemplation of nature.* Modern science supplies an intimate knowledge of the wonders of earth, sky, sea, and all that is therein; our literature teems with celebrations of the glories of the material universe; and this feature of our day calls for devout thanksgiving. Yet we may remind ourselves that the water-lillies are not the river. The natural must not be allowed to eclipse the spiritual in which it lives and holds together. Suns, moons, and stars are golden lotus-flowers of the river of God; they derive their splendour from Him, they are sustained by Him, and we must not permit them to divert our gaze from the Deity who streams through the creation making it all that it is.

Very steadily did psalmist and prophet distin-

guish between the lily and the river, recognising the vital tide as the supreme consideration. Moses always beholds nature in God, springing out of God and showing forth His wisdom and goodness. Not for a moment does he regard the things that are seen as detached from the Almighty Spirit " by whose aid the world's foundations first were laid." Job had an eye as curious and penetrating for the mysteries of matter as Lucretius had, and a yet richer poetry to describe them; but whilst the Roman saw only the lotus-flowers, the patriarch beheld the river, the river of God which is full of water, the streaming energy of the divine and eternal. " The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handywork. In them hath He set a tabernacle for the sun." Thus throughout all his singing does the sweet singer of Israel celebrate the power and beauty of the Creater shining through the creation. " Lift up your eyes on high, and see who hath created these, that bringeth out their host by number: He calleth them all by name; by the greatness of His might, and for that He is strong in power, not one is lacking." The naturalistic poetry of Isaiah is superb; but he and all the seers delight themselves in God, not in forms, however perfect, not in space, however vast, not in colours, however beautiful. They glanced at the lotus, they gloried in the river.

How immense the difference when we turn to some of our poets and scientists! God is not in any of their thoughts. We do rejoice that our greatest poets share the devoutness of Wordsworth, to whom a snowdrop was "part of the Sermon on the Mount"; and that the greatest of scientists share the faith of Wallace, who can see in the vast variety of nature "the proofs of an organising and directive life-principle," the clear "working out of a preconceived design"; but how strange to read the undevout astronomer, the naturalist who fails to catch a glimpse of the spirituality of the universe, the historian who sees no purpose in the process of the suns, the artist who acknowledges no transcending ideas in the things of beauty! These men who ought to discover for us the sources of the mystic Nile and make ours its availing virtues, strangely forget their vocation, seeing and telling only of the lotus. "To the eye of the man of imagination, Nature is Imagination itself," wrote Blake. Which is only another way of saying, to the spiritual all nature is spiritual; and in very truth he who fails to see in creation the revelation of the living, loving, holy God is blind to its real beauty, and altogether misses the significance of its message. "The life of our spirit" is not in stopping short with phenomena, but in the vision of the good Lord who at once hides and reveals Himself in the glory of the world.

In our study of the Scriptures it is necessary to keep in view that "the life of our spirit" is not in the literary excellence of these documents, but much rather in their spiritual purport. A very considerable literature is now devoted to the setting forth of the merits of the medium of revelation, its eloquence and poetry, its historic value, the beauty and majesty of its style. And Bible-lovers are inclined to be gushingly grateful when rationalistic critics acknowledge the rhetorical and literary claims of the sacred book. Again we repeat, that "the lotus-flowers are not the Nile." The river of healing and life consists in the divine truths which appeal to the conscience and heart; its revelation of the heavenly Father, the mighty Redeemer, the hallowing Spirit, the eternal rest. Whatever is less than this, otherwise than this, is of little consequence.

Lately it has seemed as though there was a danger lest the Bible was to be emptied of its supernatural content, and henceforth valued chiefly for its poetic and antiquarian interest. In the Italian city of Loretto, famed for its legendary miraculous cures, there is what is known as the apothecary's shop of the Holy House, originally founded to afford medicines gratis to the poor pilgrims resorting to the sacred shrine. Among the founders of this institution were some of the Dukes of Urbino, and they presented to it

a considerable number of vases beautifully painted, it is alleged by Raphael, to contain the magical specifics. Somehow now the medicines have lost their repute, but the shop is largely frequented by æsthetic visitors anxious to inspect the empty pots because of their rich adornments and splendid name. Does this incident of history prefigure the fate awaiting revelation? When the critics have discredited its vital teachings as mere myths of a superstitious age, and rational men no longer resort to it for the balm of the sick soul, is the empty shell to be retained because of its picturesqueness and the great names and traditions with which somehow it has been associated? At the moment the trend is rather strongly in this direction. Every sinister blow struck against its spiritual authority is supposed to be atoned for by a eulogy on its fine writing. Archbishop Alexander reprobates the fashion: "The mode at present in vogue of reading the Old Testament is entirely critical and literal. So, indeed, is the study of the New Testament. Picturesqueness is the modern substitute for spirituality. . . . The old Puritan waxed fierce against the 'word-warriors,' who made the leaves of Scripture like those of the logicians. What of the word-painters under whose art the pages of Moses or of St. John are no more spiritual than those of Macaulay?" The Nile

dries up, and its pure waters cease to vivify the moral wastes, but we are consoled with the lotus.

It is quite lawful and even praiseworthy to read the Bible for the joy of the understanding; but if we proceed no farther than this, we fall just infinitely short of its design. We admire the magnificent diction and imagery of Moses and Job, of David and Isaiah, of John and Paul, of prophets and apostles, yet their kindlings into oratory and song are the accidents of revelation: the purple and golden flowers which embroider the banks and deck the crystal river flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb. It is the river that satisfies the thirst of the perishing, that cleanses the leper, and makes everything to live. Let me be sure in my study of God's most holy Word to fasten on its very heart and essence. The truth as it convinces of sin and righteousness, declares the Sin-bearer, makes wise unto salvation, becomes a lamp unto the feet and a light unto the path, makes pure and keeps pure—these must be the objects of our quest, the treasure we covet. The floral belongings delight imagination and gratify sentiment; but the "things by which men live, and wholly therein is the life of the spirit," the cleansing, invigorating, guiding, satisfying virtue, is in the knowledge, and ever fuller knowledge, of Him who is the life, the truth, and the way.

In public worship we do well to recall the text. Devotion can be made pleasing to eye, ear, and intellect, and there is no reason why it should not be thus pleasing to the æsthetic and intellectual sense. Yet here again the caution is timely that "the lotus-flowers are not the Nile." The song may be a musical triumph without bringing into the heart of the congregation any real blessing. The sermon may be an oratorical masterpiece, and yet a vermilion-steeped cloud without water. The sacraments may be elaborated into magnificent spectacles without conveying a particle of grace. The sanctuary may be a dream of architecture, and yet the worshippers pass out of its gates without having caught a glimpse of the beauty of the Lord. These flowers garnish the river's brink; they are not the river, and all who trust in them suffer grevious disappointment. Thousands of saints drink from "the river that makes glad the city of our God," and drinking live for ever, without one gay blossom to decorate the border, and the artistic thing is never essential. The true worshipper concentrates himself on the spiritual design, and awaits the inward blessing.

If we are to keep the sacred day in any saving sense, we must be "in the Spirit on the Lord's day." Sir Archibald Geikie tells of the Scotch laird who dabbled in water-colours; "he painted a picture every day, and on Sundays he painted a

church." Very complacently we honour the holy day: in superficial ways we distinguish it and suppose that we have sanctified it. Yet it is altogether another thing to enter upon it with a prepared heart, listening for its voices, watching for its visions. How often these days "of heaven" pass without heavenly boons! Feverish days are behind us, feverish days before us, and we hardly wet our parched lips at the brook by the way. Sing with the Spirit. In these days when music has become somewhat of a religion itself it is easy to be so far entranced with organ and song as to become oblivious to the spiritual meaning of the uplifted strain. Let not the fairest flowers of melody beguile and distract, but diligently suck their spiritual sweetness to your great illumination and refreshment. Nothing in sacred music is of worth except as it cherishes the soul in strength and pureness—the rest is wind only.

The sermon, so far as it concerns the preacher, ought to be a special message from God. Corot said, "Art should be an individual expression of the verities." Could a better definition be given of the true sermon than to say, it is the individual expression of the eternal verities? And as such the congregation should receive it. Whatever the sermon contains that is not for the heart is an impertinence. It is sad trifling with lotus-flowers whilst souls are consumed with thirst, and the Saviour of the World cries,

"Come unto Me, and drink." Pray that the glory of the sacraments may be the presence of the Master. Pictures of the Last Supper exist which have been painted so elaborately and gorgeously that the Lord Himself is lost in the pomp. What is the solemn festival worth that does not more fully disclose the Master, and cause us to know more richly the hallowing virtue of His death? Unless we leave His table strengthened by His grace, more devoted to His service, more fit to see His face, we are only mocked by the eucharistic lilies. At all times, then, enter the gates of Zion with an earnest desire to behold the beauty of the Lord, and know that nothing is good enough in song, sermon, or sacrament, except as it tends to make us more like Him. The lotus-flowers quench no thirst, they still no pangs of hunger; nay, if we are not careful, they may actually choke the living stream. Oh for reality in all that concerns the soul! Never deceived by forms, never accepting shadows for the substance, never cheated out of the spiritual by the sensational. The soul in fellowship with God is the actuality. "O Lord, by these things men live, and wholly therein is the life of my spirit."

In all *the pleasant things of human life* let us not forget that God's blessing is the vital thing. It is well when it pleases Heaven to grant health, promotion, friendship, success, and pleasure.

Rarely in life is it roses, roses all the way; yet at times our Heavenly Father sprinkles our path with pleasant flowers, and we ought to be alert to golden gifts and seasons. But here, again, it is necessary to remind ourselves "that the lotus-flowers are not the Nile." These gifts are precious and satisfying only whilst we drink of the river of God's pleasure. The richest terrestrial blessings are vain except as they derive a secret virtue from spiritual grace. Wandering in the forests of the Amazon, and gazing up through the leafy canopy at the midnight heavens, the naturalist finds it easy to mistake the fireflies flitting among the foliage for the brightly shining stars; so are men apt to mistake the glittering things of the moment for the solid glories of eternity. We soon, however, awake to the mockery. Without God infuses into natural blessings heavenly virtue, they are vain and derisive. This is the teaching of the Old Testament. In "the blessing, wherewith Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death," the benediction of Joseph proceeds: "Blessed of the Lord be his land; for the precious things of heaven, for the dew, and for the deep that coucheth beneath, and for the precious things of the fruits of the sun, and for the precious things of the growth of the moons, and for the chief things of the ancient mountains,

and for the precious things of the everlasting hills, and for the precious things of the earth and the fulness thereof, and the good will of Him that dwelt in the bush: let the blessing come upon the head of Joseph." The whole catalogue of precious things was idle without the last item. "The good will of Him that dwelt in the bush" must be added if the coveted things are to possess sufficiency. And in the New Testament, when our Lord was tried by the vision of worldly power and splendour, He recalled on that occasion the great words written by Moses: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Not in the grandest things of this world is the life of the spirit. The spiritual sanctifies the natural and satisfies the heart. Beds of royal flowers do not secure the peace of the soul; the silver tide that quenches the thirst is the sense of the divine love streaming through earthly things. That river is often without the lotus at all; nay, its banks are not rarely savage steeps lined with brier, and yet it is not less a river of life, and not less satisfying. Let us not dream that the best things men covet bring content, or that the dark things they most dread deny content. The assurance of God's nearness, that He ordains our lot, that He blesses our prosperity, that He overrules our sorrows, that He makes

all things work together for our good, is the one condition of peace and hope. "O Lord, by these things men live, and wholly therein is the life of my spirit."

VIII

THE KEYSTONE OF LIFE

The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones . . . the twelfth, amethyst.—Rev. xxi. 19, 20.

THE Greeks bestowed this name on the stone which constitutes the undermost tier in the foundation-stones of the New Jerusalem because of its supposed virtue in protecting its wearer from the vice of intemperance—amethyst, esteemed, as the word implies, a preventive or antidote of drunkenness. We shall hardly err if we construe the position of this gem in relation to the gorgeous superstructure to signify that temperance is the foundation on which rests whatever is precious, beautiful, and delightful in human life. By temperance we mean the power to resist, reject, regulate, and subordinate lower things and appetites to supreme considerations.

Temperance is the foundation of *character*. The truth illustrated in the pictorial presentment of the text is often insisted upon by revelation. St. Peter begins his scale of graces, "In your faith supply virtue." Virtue here is another word

for strength, sobriety, sovereignty. Faith is the origin and inspiration of all moral perfections, but decisiveness and energy of resolution is its initial creation, and only after this foundation is truly laid can we confidently proceed to build with the silver, gold, and precious stones of the various graces. So long as we are defective in self-denial, self-mastery, self-rule, so long is all building in character and action unsatisfactory. How truly precarious are the most attractive traits of character when not based on power of resolution, resistance, renunciation—on the sovereignty of the spirit! As all know, the Greeks were master-builders; their three orders of architecture have secured the admiration of succeeding generations, and yet, notwithstanding the variety and beauty of their several styles of edification, they failed to include the arch, which would have imparted to temple, palace, and theatre strength and stability as well as an added grace. Strangely enough, they overlooked this cardinal principle of construction. How often do we meet with men and women who recall the oversight of the Greek builder! Whilst possessed of brilliant gifts, rare qualities, attractive graces, and polished after the similitude of a palace, they lack the fundamental strength of character which gives reality, coherence, and efficiency to so much that is admirable. The ornate Corinthian, the sculpture and pointing of

the Doric, the grace and dignity of the Ionic architecture are represented in their fine characteristics; but the solid basis, the supporting corner-stone, the binding arch, are absent. Repeatedly do we witness fascinating character breaking down and sinking into ruin because the eleven tiers of jewelled superstructure do not rest on the twelfth foundation of amethyst—the power of denial, the autsere government of appetite, the mastery of the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life.

No man is grander than he who puts coercion upon himself, who severely tempers or absolutely lets alone whatever has become a snare, or is at all likely to become a snare. Renouncing totally the indulgence in which he scents danger, or, if that is not practicable, subjecting it to narrowest limits, the tempted one becomes the most sterling of heroes. At some time most of us are called upon to wage a close, bitter, and deadly struggle with some capital temptation or besetting sin; and if we set our teeth, wrestle with and overthrow it, we achieve victory and glory beyond any laurels reaped on fields of blood. None has reason to be ashamed because there are places into which he dare not venture, habits he fears to allow, indulgences upon which he cannot trust himself to look. Those who thus work out their salvation with fear and trembling are the bravest, manliest, and noblest of us all.

Their persistent abstinence and control shows that divine grace has laid in their nature the amethyst basement upon which may be safely built all the golden glories, bejewelled towers, and delectable pleasures of the New Jerusalem. But without this sobriety of mind, temper, and appetite, our foundations of sapphires, windows of agates, gates of carbuncles, and borders of pleasant stones are pathetically precarious, trembling in jeopardy every hour. Nothing is safe in character, however splendid, except as we live vigilant in spirit, master of desire, strong against every temptation that assaults the senses or lures the imagination. The buffeting of the body, the rebuking of desire, the registering of vows and pledges, may seem to belong to the elementary stages of moral education; but without such discipline and the substratum that it secures, the superstructure of painted windows, the graceful domes and gilded pinnacles of refined character and cultured life, may any moment sink into ruin. "A foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and smote upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall thereof." It has been remarked that, even when uncivilised, man is called upon to exercise more or less wit before he may eat, and the higher his grade, the more stress upon his intelligence. This, however, is just as true concerning the

measure of his indulgence as of its quality; the higher the intelligence and moral rank, the less must there be of the pampering of the senses.

Sobriety is the foundation of *enjoyment.* Excess in any direction is fatal to full and abiding joy. Satisfaction is a very elusive thing, and inordinate desire or indulgence in even slight degree is sufficient to destroy it. Men who counsel moderation in amusements and appetite are sometimes mocked as "kill-joys"; yet is there no more effectual way of killing joy than having too much of a good thing. "Hast thou found honey? Eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it." And the Persian proverb counsels to the same effect: "Eating too much of sweets gives the heartburn." Charles Kingsley relates that as a small boy he was passionately fond of the scent of syringa; and one day he thrust his head into a bush and drank in the fragrance till it suddenly turned into a nauseating stench; so that from that moment his horror of it was as great as his former enjoyment, and never did he forget that sharp reminder that one might have too much of a good thing. Robert Collyer, of Boston, relates a similar experience: "When I had been a few weeks in this country, I tasted for the first time in my life an exquisite summer luxury; and it seemed so good that I thought I could never get enough of it. I got some more, and then

some more, and then I found for the first time, I think, what it is to have too much of a good thing. I ate, that day, of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and now I care nothing for that good thing any more when I taste it. Impatience got the rein, and I gathered and ate the whole harvest of that good thing between dawn and dark." The majority of us, by bitter experience, have been taught the same lesson; by impatience, greediness, selfishness, we defeat ourselves, spoiling the rarest gifts of life. Happiness is a butterfly calling for delicate handling.

Self-discipline, it cannot too often be repeated, is the imperative condition of satisfying pleasure. We do not enjoy enough because we are not prepared on occasion to deny ourselves enough. Cardan, the eccentric French philosopher, used to inflict upon himself long fasts, so that he might enjoy to the full the pleasures of eating. There is no need for such artificial expedients; but his philosophy was right enough—sobriety is the basis of keen and enduring enjoyment. And it may well be that because we lack in restraint we are so discontented, missing the finer joy of the strong and pure. The whole eleven foundations are included in the lot of many of the sons and daughters of prosperity, all the colours of the rainbow are reflected in their person, home, and path; all manner of precious stones gleam in their propitious circumstances—

red, golden, violent, purple—all the splendid stratifications of completed fortune are comprehended in their singularly favoured destiny; yet because the twelfth foundation is lacking, the basal amethyst—the power of simplicity, frugality, and moderation—all their splendour is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought, and finally they come to hate the lovely and precious things which otherwise dazzle and delight. We spend our time scheming how to multiply our possessions and entertainments, and somehow after all miss the promised joy. Is not our method at fault? Is not the truer course to chasten our prosperity? Robert Louis Stevenson writes: "There is but one art—to omit! Oh, if I knew how to omit, I would ask no other knowledge. A man who knew how to omit would make an 'Iliad' of a daily paper." Is not elimination, suppression, curtailment, also the secret of life as of literature? The man who knows how to omit finds a paradise in the little that is left. This way lies the secret of felicity, and not in multiplicity, scale, and satiety. More and more gaining the contented mind, dispensing more easily with carnal things, growing in the humility which is only a form of strength, we prove the deeper contentment; possessing our soul, we possess our possessions, oblivious of their limits. Strengthening the lower tier, the

many-coloured glories of the jewel-heap throughout all their series flash out, and the fullness of wonder and joy is ours.

We may take a wider view and remind ourselves that the permanent prosperity of a nation is guaranteed only by general restraint and denial. In a remarkable passage, Alfred Russel Wallace points out how in animals a natural development in size and ornament may ultimately operate to the injury and extinction of the species: "The glorious train of the peacock might have begun in mere density of plumage covering a vital part and one specially subject to attack by birds or beasts of prey, and, once started, these plumes would continue to increase in number and size, as being an outlet for vital energy, till at last they became so enormously lengthened as to become dangerous, by their weight being a check to speed in running or agility in taking flight. This is already the case with the peacock, which has some difficulty in rising from the ground and flies very heavily. In the Argus-pheasant it is the secondary wing-feathers that are exceedingly long and broad, so as to be almost as much a hindrance to strong or rapid flight as is the train of the peacock; and in both birds these ornamental plumes have evidently reached the utmost dimensions compatible with the safety of the species. The ex-

pansion of the wings in butterflies and moths reaches a maximum in several distinct families . . . in all of which it is sometimes from nine to ten inches. The progressive development of many groups of animals affords curious illustrations of this continuous increase in bulk, or in the size of particular organs, till they have actually overpassed the line of permanent safety, and under the first adverse conditions have led to extinction."* Are not these creatures, whose bulk and various ornamental or useful appendages have reached or even overpassed the maximum of utility, symbols of vanished civilisations destroyed by their overgrown greatness and opulence? Is not the same law of evolution proceeding in the sovereign civilisations of to-day? How, then, shall we be saved? In the power of perpetual denial and sacrifice. Here we can, as it were, create for ourselves that severe environment which is ever essential to strong life; thus we can check the temptation to inordinate dominion, splendor, and luxury, and by this enforced moderation escape the fate of Babylon, whilst we secure the immortality of the New Jerusalem whose foundation is laid in the amethyst. If growing national wealth and glory are not to issue in our ruin, they must be chastened by simplicity, temperance, and unselfishness.

Temperance is the foundation of *influence*.

* "The World of Life."

We feel an instinctive admiration for men who yield nothing to appetite. The severity of the Spartan evokes the respect of successive generations. The stoicism of Greek and Roman, whatever its defects, is counted noble by the noble. And the asceticism of the Church in later ages, although so often sullied by fanaticism, inspires sincere reverence. The race intuitively recognises wherein its salvation lies, and knows abstinence to be the saving salt of life. It is quite credible that the habitual temperance and purity of Livingstone explain the awe with which the natives regarded him, and the charmed life he lived in dark and bloody regions. The savage discerns the superiority of sobriety and chastity; and the most cultivated types, although themselves too often defective in the sterner virtues, pay sincere reverence to those who keep themselves unspotted from the flesh. All have noticed how little influence persons possess who are yet greatly gifted and highly placed; despite their rank, learning, and eloquence, they are lightly reckoned. The suspicion of a weakness of character is fatal to their popularity. They display one layer after another of diamond-like faculties and forces, but the absence of the amethyst course neutralises all the charm. And this is true in all spheres. He who would exert vital and benign influence can do so only whilst it is seen that he is wholly master of himself and

of his situation. There may even be a good deal of wood, hay, and stubble in the upper tiers; yet if the jewel of self-denial is at the base, more homage will be rendered there than at shrines where all the precious stones gleam except the amethyst.

"And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." The ancient stoicism perceived the necessity of setting stern limits to the clamour of the senses. Self-discipline was of its very essence; it regarded with contempt both pleasure and pain. The doctrine of the Stoics has extorted the praise of the very greatest philosophers of all succeeding ages. It must, however, be allowed that Christianity sets whatever is noble in the teaching of ascetic systems in a far more reasonable and convincing light. It brings us the perfect pattern. How vividly does Milton, in "Paradise Regained," depict the temperance of our Lord! "A table richly spread in regal mode, with dishes pil'd," "wine that fragrant smell diffused," "with fruits and flowers."

> And all the while harmonious airs were heard
> Of chiming strings, of charming pipes.

Yet the Son of God in His bitter hunger turns from the "pompous delicacies" which solicited Him; and the tempter confesses:

Thy temperance, invincible besides,
For no allurement yields to appetite;
And all Thy heart is set on high designs,
High actions.

In the presence of Jesus the thought of indulgence is impossible. But there was in Him no hardness, harshness, pride, or cynicism; as the Oriental proverb expresses it, He blended as never before the "iron and the rose." The ideal of the stoicism coveted by the noblest spirits of classic lands was incarnated in Him who "came both eating and drinking"; yet no breath of suspicion dimmed His crystal purity.

By giving ascendency to the spirituality of our nation and opening to us a new world of high gratifications, the fascination of carnal life is tempered and destroyed. Stoicism was a system of prohibition and restraint; but in Christ Jesus we become new creatures, every passion purified, whilst a new world of delight invites and absorbs. It is no longer a question of restraint; the impulse and passion of the true and pure chasten all natural life and render excess of riot impossible. The glare of Belshazzar's feast is hideous to those who know the simple and solemn beauty of the Lord's Supper; who share His nature, lean on His breast, and regale themselves on the pure pleasures of His kingdom. The black magic of sensualism is destroyed by

the white magic of a pure strong soul walking in the light. And the thought of the vaster life awaiting us deprives the pleasures of the moment of their hypnotism. All is balanced and moderated by the high hope. "And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible."

IX

THE HOLIDAY HOURS OF THE SOUL

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul.—Ps. xxiii. 2, 3.

IN his chapter on "The Natural History of Rest," Professor Arthur Thomson points out the large provision that nature makes for resting. This appears in vegetation. In winter "seeds are resting in the ground, buds are resting on the boughs." An outlook on the animate world impresses us yet more with the restfulness of living creatures. "Whether they be whirling beetles or the trees of the forest, living creatures are material systems which have *the power of taking rests.*" And the scientist points out how severe is the penalty of neglecting to these rests in which an organism accumulates fresh measures of energy. "The need for rest is primitive, and the resting habit has its roots in the remotest past, and its reason in the nature of things."*

In his highest life man needs the intervals of rest, reverie, and contemplation. To a very large extent the soul is necessarily in a state of ten-

* "The Biology of the Seasons."

sion—watching, reasoning, resisting, working, achieving. The present is the season of duty and opportunity, and it behoves us to concentrate ourselves on the momentous business. Nothing akin to sloth is permitted in a true life; its distinctive note is strenuousness. "Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it with thy might," is no counsel of perfection to the saint; it is the legend and law of his life. Yet, unless moments, hours, days of relaxation intervene, the soul cannot be at its healthiest and best. A recent article in the newspaper sang the praises of a city garden. Nowhere, it was said, are the restfulness and delight of a garden more accentuated than when the country is brought into the town. The sordid scene around acts like a foil to the loveliness within; the stillness of the sequestered coign is deepened by the hum of the streets; the repose is all the more profound because of the consciousness of the restless tide of intense life breaking against the garden wall. Body, mind, and temper, it was maintained, are wondrously soothed and refreshed by a turn or two in the leafy retreat, especially during the burden and heat of the day. This is at least equally true as it concerns the spiritual life. To con a choice page in an inspired author; to muse on a stanza where the minstrel struck a deeper chord; to linger awhile in the King's meadows of Holy Writ, where the

grass is green and the waters crystal; the upward glance when none but God is nigh; the calmness on tumult's wheel, midst busy multitudes alone; the snatched fellowship with a kindred spirit, like two barques hailing each other on the high seas; the golden parenthesis when the soul ceases from itself, only looking, waiting, resting, —moments and moods like these count for much in Christian life and experience, and we are all the poorer when we fail to anticipate and treasure them. All that the silent hour implies, who may express? Some are ready to count it a lost hour, or at least one with little to show for itself; but, in fact, the parenthesis of quiet thought, meditative reading, and the prayer that comes as breathing comes, is truly golden.

In another of his works Professor Thomson has a most suggestive passage on the antithesis which exists between science and emotion, and of the way in which they mutually serve one another. "We have spoken of the pleasure which man has in the contemplation and study of nature, but it must be granted that the scientific mood often intrudes on our delight, elbowing us away from the emotional window. Yet the end is always that the window is widened. Darwin once expressed the delight he had when on a rare occasion he surrendered himself under the trees to the child's pleasure of just watching the birds and insects and all the rest, without vexing

himself for once over the problems of origin. But how he has widened the emotional window for mankind, for all who feel the grandeur of the evolution-idea!"* In the spiritual life it is much the same. Hours of thought and action, intense, anxious, and solemn, are inevitable in the great life lived by the spiritual; but just as Darwin found refreshment by dismissing problems and resigning himself to the simple pleasure of watching the sportive creation around him, so on rare days the saint, lighting on an oasis of rest, dreamingly muses on the beautiful thoughts and things of God, and in so doing stores strength against strenuous days. In the alternations of active and passive moods the soul is nursed into completeness.

In undistracted and unstrained intervals we often get the clearest sight of eternal truths. The soul agitated by cares, tortured by problems, absorbed by insistent duty, is not in the best condition to see clearly, or to catch those undertones which mean more than all strident voices. The most noteworthy recent improvements in astronomical research are said to be mainly concerned with the comfort of the observer, which, though in some aspects a mere detail, is of the greatest importance in delicate observation, when the nerves and muscles should be as free from strain as possible. So various ingenious mechan-

* "Introduction to Science."

ical contrivances have been introduced to secure the perfect ease of the modern observer. He escapes exposure to the cold which paralysed the old star-watchers, and instead of lying on his back, or twisting his neck according to the vagaries of the object to be observed, he enjoys a constant and comfortable position. If, then, it is desirable that the astronomer avoid discomforts and inclemencies which put a strain on his nerves and muscles, so that he may be entirely free to follow without distraction the delicate aspects and motions of the heavens, is it not essential that we should secure seasons when, free from strain, we can directly and intently consider the highest truths, which are the stars, moons, and suns of the eternal firmament? In the hours when we enjoy immunity from griefs, problems, cares, and fightings, we often get the gleams which satisfy, guide, and inspire. When our soul is detached, our entire being at leisure, our whole attitude unconstrained and receptive, God whispers us in the ear, and we catch the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, and welcome delicate signs of the divine presence and leading. "Nathanael saith unto Him, Whence knowest Thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee." In seasons of silence and solitude, of devout reverie and aspiration, the Master

finds us, reveals Himself to us, opens to our understanding and heart new and larger truths, tells us His secret, shows us His covenant.

Gracious respite from the tax and dissipation of ordinary life implies spiritual health and safety as well as illumination. Medical men account for the recent alarming increase in insanity in this country on the ground of the increased strenuousness of modern life, and Professor Thomson warns the busy against neglecting the rest interval. As the intensity of life increases rest becomes more and more imperative. The alternative is disease, insanity, death. We may, then, reasonably conclude that unremitting application is at least equally unfavourable to the clearness and health of the soul. Moments of quiet thought free us from the ominous howl and fang of cares and fears which ever press close on our heels. "Feeding among the lilies" is a phrase sounding mainly sentimental, and it is one certainly that does not commend itself to the active and robust saint; yet it pictures a mood of recreation of the first importance to the hard-pressed and over-burdened. Macdougall, in his pretty book on "The Fields of France," tells how the game-preserves become annually impracticable for the chase owing to the presence of sweet flowers. Every May a beautiful fault frustrates the sport, for, thick as grass, thick and sweet, the lily of the valley

springs in all the brakes and shady places. The scent of the game will not lie across these miles of blossom. The hunters are in despair, and the deer, still deafened with the winter's yelp of the hounds, beholds himself at last befriended by an ally more invincible than water or forest oak, by the sweet and innumerable white lilies that every May-time send the huntsmen home. Feeding among the perfumed flowers, the gazelle exults in safety and delight. Thus the hunted and panting soul finds rest and renewal in green pastures, whilst the fierce pack that yelp and worry stand outside the enchanted ring. Let not even the most militant and vehement despise the hushed hour, the season of grace and sweet delight, the murmured song, the hallowed truce of reverie, adoration, and fellowship, lest the crowd of gnawing solicitudes and sorrows worry out the life divine. "Forasmuch as this people hath refused the waters of Shiloah that go softly . . . now therefore, behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the River, strong and many." Give this prophecy a spiritual interpretation, and say that he who despises the little bright brook of rest, who ignores the holiday hours of the soul, shall become the victim of feverish days which waste and wreck like overflowing waters.

In the interludes of life we repair the waste and injury of the days of urgency and strenuous-

ness. Thomson observes, "The activities of daily life involve wear and tear of the vital machinery. There must be rest for repair. In the simplest animals this wear and tear is reduced to a minimum, for the repair is approximately perfect, so that little rest is required. In more complex animals, however, the wear and tear is greater as life becomes fuller, the agencies for repair have a more difficult task, especially as regards hard-worked organs, such as heart and brain, liver and kidneys. . . . If we are to be kept whole or if we are to be healed, if we need to moult our worn-out armour and present a new front to the world, if we are to reconstruct our system of experience, if we are to have any metamorphosis, the analogy of Nature points to the fact that we must have rest." How clearly does this physical necessity shadow forth the demands of the spiritual life! After searching trials of faith and wrestling with strong temptation, after bearing heavy burdens of trouble and suffering and accomplishing tasks of rare difficulty, we become conscious of exhaustion and distress. The strain sets up a reaction toward discouragement and deadness. Do we not see this in Elijah the Tishbite? After his whole soul had been called forth in conflict with Ahab there followed a pathetic collapse. "He himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper

tree: and he requested for himself that he might die." And only after the angel of the Lord had touched him the second time, and said, "Arise and eat," did he become himself again. Nay, our Lord himself needed the balmy pause. "Then the devil leaveth Him; and behold, angels came and ministered unto Him." He in whom ideal humanity was revealed spent His force in conflict, and for reinforcement needed celestial repose and refreshment. How much more do His disciples require the timely succour! Not only is the breathing space called for by extraordinary experiences, but the ordinary stretches of monotonous life are often attended with a sense of fatigue as difficult to bear as the acuter strain and sorrow of crises. Except tranquillising hours intervene, we may lose freshness of faith and feeling in dullness as in tragedy.

The scientist reminds us that "the wear and tear is greater as life becomes fuller"; and this fact is of much significance as it concerns the Christian. In spiritually minded men life comes to its fullest, intensest, highest. He who lives in the fear of the Almighty, who covets high ideals, who habitually regards things in their eternal relations, lives abundantly, lives intensely, and there must come moments of the tired soul. How varied, vivid, and momentous are the experiences of the saints! How often are the depths

of their nature agitated! How severe is the tension to which their faculties are being continually subjected! The whole religious life puts special extortion on thought, emotion, volition, on brain, conscience, and heart, and demands frequent intervals of suspension and renewal. None need the cordial of rest as do the saints, whose faith and duty quicken into intensest action all that is within them; the pressure of the supernatural calls for the renewed consolations and strengthenings of the supernatural. In seasons of seclusion and stillness we repair the waste of wearisome and agonising hours. "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul." Surrendering ourselves to quiet communion with God, for awhile resting from all our thinkings, achings, and strivings, leaving all things for once in our Heavenly Father's hands, secret wounds are healed, gathering unbeliefs are dispelled, displaced armour is re-fixed, the jaded mind revives, the regenerative faculty gets a chance, the soul at the point of death is recreated.

May we not ask ourselves the question, Is not our frequent moodiness and spiritlessness the natural consequence of the omission of such seasons of absolute repose? We know our unhappy condition when a night's rest is lost. We are conscious that to take the Sunday out of the

week would entail upon us lassitude and misery. To miss the summer vacation—the stroll through the fields, the idling by the river, the dreaming by the sea—would mar all the year. And what must it mean to our spiritual health and joyousness to ignore the opportunities to climb Hill Clear, to dream in the Chamber called Peace, to breathe the sweet air of the Delectable Mountains, to muse in the meadows and sunshine of Beulah? "They that wait upon the Lord," are silent before the Lord, "shall renew their strength."

Is not, then, the conclusion of the whole matter that we should give larger place in life for meditation and brooding than most of us are accustomed to give? Let us include in our arrangements the quiet hour, or the five minutes with God, when we give Him an opportunity to speak to us. To see the importance of rare seasons of retirement and reflection, and duly to plan for them is to secure them. When the preciousness of the pauses of life is once appreciated, they come to our relief oftener than we think. Not a day but we may slip into some sweet haven on the stormy coast, and sail forth again gaily to dare the deep. And often do the silent watches of the night bring privileged moments. "I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel: yea, my reins instruct me in the night seasons." A French writer says, "If

you wish to fix the solar spectrum, retire into the dark room"; in the dark God often causes heavenly truths to reveal themselves with singular beauty and power. On unlikely days, in strange nooks and corners, gracious interludes and bowers surprise us, and in the strength and sweetness of a piece of honeycomb we find that the journey is not too great.

It would not be well for us perhaps to become mystics, hermits, quietists; in these is seen the exaggeration of right qualities and tendencies; yet the mystic, the quietist, the monkish, ought to have a place in us all, and Heaven will guide the sincere into the golden mean between society and solitude, between the active and meditative courses of life. In these times, when the world is too much with us, clamouring so loudly and insistently, we do well to correct the balance by giving the cloister the utmost of its lawful claim. To walk on the world's burning marl is to render the dewy grass of the green pasture very grateful to our scorched feet; and we walk all the more safely on the heated highway because we taste His solacements which is as the dew unto Israel.

X

GOLDEN IGNORANCES

I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple unto that which is evil.—Rom. xvi. 19.

THE notion is widely prevalent that it is our duty to imbue the mind with all the questionings, doubts, and scepticisms of the day. Some consider it a deficiency in intellectual character if we fail to do so. It is assumed that we cannot properly know that the great articles of the Christian faith are entitled to trust except we have acquainted ourselves with hostile criticism generally; if we fail to do this, it is inferred that our religion can be only emotional, sentimental, superstitious. The apostle in the place before us intimates that a grave error lies at the root of this kind of reasoning. He is putting the Roman Christians on their guard against the sanctimonious cant by which certain heretical brethren were seeking to delude the hearts of guileless people. These obnoxious teachers were attempting by subtle theorisings to empty Christian doctrine of its vital content, and to reduce it to vain and vapoury speculation which could only issue in licentiousness. They

were the ancestors of many modern philosophisers and critics. The apostle puts the Roman Church on its guard against these beguilers. "Only I wish you to be wise as to what is good, but uncontaminated (by defiling knowledge) as to what is evil. He would not have their holy readiness to believe distorted into an unhallowed and falsely tolerant curiosity" (Moule). "Defiling knowledge" was the peril against which St. Paul sought to protect them. He had evidently in mind our Lord's requirement that whilst His disciples were to be spiritually intelligent they should also in thought and life be pure as doves.

We are under no obligation to cloud our faith with others' scepticisms. When difficulties arise in our mind, spring out of our own heart and experience, we must frankly deal with them; yet it is a huge mistake gratuitously to disturb and defile our mind with the theological hesitations, negations, and fancies of strangers. If a cloud drift across our sky, we must patiently await the return of the light; there is no reason, however, that we should blot out the blue by plunging our soul into every dirty fog that rises like an exhalation from the ground. Face the spectres of our own mind we must; but to rifle the skeleton-cupboards of our neighbours, and voluntarily afflict ourselves with the gibbering ghosts of their unbelief, is foolish in the extreme. Our faith

may be rational without this process, far more rational than with it. Sir Henry Bessemer, whose remarkable discoveries are a feature of our age, declared that in his various successes he was greatly indebted to a "golden ignorance." He meant to say that he approached the study of the problems he attacked without prepossessions and prejudices, he had nothing to unlearn, his mind was open and free to receive new impressions without having to struggle against the bias of false ideas. He was debtor to his ignorance, he scrutinised things with fresh eyes, and accordingly recognised the truth. Men who come to the study of revelation in a similarly unsophisticated spirit are most likely to apprehend the saving truth, and it is in this spirit that we ought to come. To approach the great teachings of Scripture with a mind debauched by misbeliefs and unbeliefs derived from controversial sources, is to render a true vision of divine truth just another miracle.

It is the merest superstition to imagine that it is rational to encumber the mind with the shot rubbish of the infidel world; or, for that matter, with the teeming distracting theories of the philosophical theology. Carlyle is to the point. "There are unhappy times in the world's history, when he that is the least educated will chiefly have to say that he is the least perverted; and with the multitude of false eye-glasses, convex, concave,

green, even yellow, has not lost the natural use of his eyes." Is not this such an unhappy time in the religious sphere? Here the least educated in the pros and cons of theological controversy are very often the least perverted. They retain the natural use of their eyes. Go to the study of the great teachings of revelation with a true heart, a sincere purpose, with fresh, sympathetic, expectant eyes, and things hidden from the wise and prudent, that is, the supercilious and sophistical, shall stand revealed. The golden ignorance of the babe and suckling, that is, of the simple and sincere, is far more rational than the false knowledge and conceit which, ever learning, never comes to the knowledge of the truth.

The tree of knowledge in Eden was to lead man to the knowledge of good and evil; and, according to the divine intention, this was to be gained through his not eating of its fruit. By obedience to the divine will he would have attained to a godlike knowledge of good and evil. Through disobedience he learned the difference between good and evil from his own guilty experience, infinite humiliation, manifold suffering, and death. So there are ever two ways of arriving at the knowledge of good and evil: the way of humility, teachableness, and obedience, leading one to a knowledge of the truth by sweet experience; or the way of doubt, denial, and disobedience, leading one also into a certain

knowledge of the truth through the bitter experience of its contrary. Our Lord "grew in wisdom" without passing through a stage of scepticism and self-will; and whosoever willeth to do the will of God shall know of the doctrine that it is of God, escaping the pain and peril of men who walk in darkness. "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." St. Paul is thinking of the old serpent who beguiled the first pair into a false pathway; and he recognises the same seducer in the troubles of Israel who were causing divisions and stumblings contrary to the doctrine of Christ, and who by their smooth and fair speech beguiled the hearts of the innocent. Revelation has demonstrated its truth and efficacy long enough and on a sufficiently wide scale as at least to justify our reverence; and we are only rational when we come to its study with deference and sympathy. It is thus that a young artist approaches Raphael, that a student listens to Newton; and surely not with less docility ought we to sit at the feet of Jesus Christ. "And the Lord God said." "And the serpent said." Let us listen to the Lord God; and if He ever spake to man, He spake in Jesus Christ. The serpent is not less poisonous glowing in the rainbow hues of literary beauty.

There is a golden ignorance of the carnal life. Very distinctly are two worlds recognised in the New Testament. Our Lord strongly expresses

this dualism. "Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world." This contrast of an upper and a lower world is ever kept steadily in view by the apostles. The one is spiritual, heavenly, and eternal; the other carnal, worldly, temporal. The citizens of the higher sphere live in the spirit; they are conscious of God, of their own divine nature; they aspire to heavenly ideals and hopes, and all terrestrial things are employed by them as instruments for the attainment of moral and spiritual ends. The subjects of the lower realm live and walk in the flesh, they mind earthly things, and aim at nothing beyond the prizes of the present. There exists between these two worlds a profound and an inevitable antagonism, and by no device can they be made to harmonise.

The apostle desires that we may be wise concerning the spiritual life, and ignorant of carnal knowledge and experience. It is thought and taught by many to-day that the culture of the life of the senses and passions is one of the worthiest vocations, a branch of knowledge in which all should strive to excel. Thus a modern writes his friend: "I don't think we should disagree much—except as to my firm conviction of the artistic and moral value of sensuality. You know in this nineteenth century we are beginning to make war upon even intellectual sensuality,

the pleasure in emotional music, the pleasure in physical grace as a study, the pleasure in coloured language and musical periods. I doubt if this is right. The puritanism of intellect is cultivated to the gain of certain degrees of power, but also to the hardening of character—ultimately tending to absolute selfishness and fixity of mental habit. Too deeply fixed in the cause of life are the pleasures of sense, to be weeded out without injury to the life-centres themselves and to all the emotions springing from them. We cannot attack the physical without attacking the moral; for evolutionally all the higher intellectual faculties have their origin in the development of the physical."* Here we have a frank apology for the flesh by a gifted, thorough-going disciple of the sensual. We are instructed to exalt the gratification of the senses into a fine art, for there are no higher faculties; we are to concentrate ourselves on the pleasures of the present, for none awaits us beyond. The theory of the apostle is exactly contrary. He had a poor opinion of men who "serve their own belly." The culture of the senses must be in strict subordination to the spiritual life and moral character; without weeding out any bodily instinct, we must austerely discipline them all in the interests of the spirit. It is not by pampering the senses that moral character is secured; rather by the

* "Japanese Letters of Lafcadio Hearn."

culture of the soul in knowledge and holiness do we discipline and ennoble the body. The saint has no occasion to defile himself by sensual lore, nor by personal acquaintance with companions, amusements, and scenes which minister to the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. His higher knowledge and purer feeling resent literature and associations spotted by the flesh. His ignorance and neglect of sensual things are purely golden.

There is also an ignorance of the world that is golden. The saint may be pardonably ignorant of much that is absorbing to the worldling. The children of this world are wiser in their generation than are the children of light, but often without any discredit to the latter. A mirage is a spectacle generally associated with an African desert; yet during the blazing weather of the last summer a remarkable mirage was witnessed in one of the busiest centres of the metropolis. In the Mall could be seen a beautiful, cool-looking, shimmering pool right across the roadway and side-paths. The trees on each side of the avenue, with rustling leaves, were mirrored quivering on its waters. It seemed as though the horses would cool their hot hoofs splashing through the water, and as if the taxicabs would dash through, throwing up spray on either side. But nothing happened; the "water" proved to be merely an optical illusion. When, however,

we come to think, the city multitude is more mocked by mirages than are travellers in the desert. What are gold, rank, greatness, pleasure, and glory, as these are popularly understood, but vapours that appear for a little time and then vanish away? Yet on behalf of these illusions, what sacrifices men make!

The spiritually minded form quite another estimate of these things, and are willingly ignorant of the philosophy and policy of the deceived. They are innocent of the cleverness by which the astute compass their selfish ends by employing agents who become scapegoats for their crafty principals. They are ignorant of the arts by which the dishonest trader despoils his neighbour. They are unable to follow the dark and tortuous paths by which the subtle climb to ignoble eminence. They are simpletons compared with the " smart set " which dazzles Vanity Fair. The diplomacy that covers so many with false glory is a riddle to patient merit. The conscientious and pure can only marvel at the inverted wisdom by which the unprincipled contrive to walk the primrose path. How ignorant is the righteous of the philosophy of the clever fool! Blessed ignorance! Men of the world and their literary representatives are fond of jibing at the saints on account of their simplicity; on the score that they have no philosophy by which they can reconcile themselves to selfish-

ness, luxury, and license: yet, concerning Babylonian dialect and black arts generally, the ignorance of the just and pure is fine gold of Ophir. When ignorance means truth, justice, and unselfishness, 'tis folly to be wise.

Ignorance of the immoral life is a duty, so far as that is possible in a world like this. Ruskin warned his scholars: "I pray you very solemnly to put that idea of knowing all things in heaven and earth out of your hearts and heads." If, then, we are to cultivate this mental modesty, and to conclude that there are many things in heaven and earth not possible or desirable for us to know, how much more should we be ready to leave outside our knowledge the things of perdition, the false and foul! Whatever pertains to violence, greed, or uncleanness, whenever it presents itself as a question of curiosity, we should leave unknown. It is commonly supposed that we are justified in unearthing the vilest secrets: a mistaken supposition, however, and one that may easily prove a fatal one. As J. J. Garth Wilkinson emphatically declares, "There are many facts which a man is a rascal for knowing; there are other facts which a man is a burglar for knowing; facts which a man is a seducer or violator for knowing; there are other facts, again, which a man is a murderer for knowing; and there are abundant facts which a man is a demon for knowing and prosecuting.

The right to know thse things, and by implication the right to know all things as truth-seekers, is the *magna charta* of house-breaking and worse violence applied to the world and all that is therein." To a noble curiosity we owe a vast realm of intellectual treasure. It prompts the seeker, lures him on to the discovery of one secret after another until the hidden wisdom and glory of nature stand revealed. One might say that curiosity is the mainspring of progress, the cause and condition of civilisation. But, on the other hand, how disastrous the working of evil curiosity! Hosts have been ruined through seeking to know the precise fact of the illegitimate; they are lost by the fascination of a morbid curiosity rather than by purposed wickedness. There are many specious arguments for sin, and we need to be on our guard. When will we once learn that there is nothing worth having on forbidden ground? Let not a morbid curiosity, however disguised, lure us from the things that are pure, the paths that are safe.

Whilst we decline any personal contact with immoral persons, places, and pleasures, it is possible in imagination to entertain a whole world of vanity and vice. We would turn with disgust from scenes of lasciviousness; while in the literature of fiction we bring cinematographs of them into our parlours and linger over the unhealthy depictions. Some of this literature is

of startling vividness, and the unfoldings of passion are presented in the most exquisite eloquence; yet is the virus of them not less but more pernicious. It may pretend to a moral motive, and yet only intensify the danger. As Madame de Lambert remarked on the tragedies of Corneille: "The best often give you lessons of virtue, and leave you with the impressions of vice." Serious men and women are as culpable who indulge so freely in the narcotics of the mind as the wanton who eats opium for the sake of knowing what dreams it creates. We cannot luxuriate in our leisure hours amid garish poison-flowers and heavy scents of voluptuousness without injury to our moral health and spiritual life. Sir George Sitwell writes concerning a lovely though deadly garden in Italy: "It is an enchanted pool in a fairy woodland. But the traveller who has wandered here alone on a drowsy afternoon does not linger to listen to the trickle of the fountain and the murmuring of the bees. From below the threshold of the mind a strange sense of hidden danger oppresses him, an instinct neither to be reasoned with nor to be understood. . . . He waits and wrestles with his folly, then sadly descending the slippery stairways, leaves cooling fount and shaded alley for the torrid sunshine of the outer world. *It is death to sleep in the garden.*"* The sickly air of impressionist fiction is similarly infectious,

however rich its language and splendid its imagery; the sensuous life is fed at the expense of the spiritual. To sleep and dream amid the voluptuous roses is to defile the soul and perchance sleep the sleep of death.

Do our best, we may not keep out the thought of evil. "There is no palace wherein foul things do not enter," and the noblest mind is exposed to the dark temptation; yet is that no reason why we should invite and extend hospitality to obscene things. Why voluntarily allow the soul-palace to be defiled—newts to infest its fountains, spiders to take hold in its chambers, moths to fret its purple, serpents to nestle among its flowers? Ignorance of evil is golden, and the more complete the ignorance the more precious the gold. God-like knowledge of iniquity is the best and truest knowledge of it, that is to be of too pure eyes to look upon it. "O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, my glory, be not thou united."

* "On the Making of Gardens."

XI

THE SLEEPING PARTNERS OF UNRIGHTEOUSNESS

Lay hands hastily on no man, neither be partakers of other men's sins: keep thyself pure.—1 TIM. v. 22.

WE cannot divest ourselves of our social relations and responsibilities, and it is well to remind ourselves that our hats do not cover the area of our responsibilities. On the one side these relations imply great privilege, but on the other they involve serious obligation; and we must not attempt to enjoy the one whilst ignoring the other. Personally, we may be innocent of this or that transgression, whilst all the time we may justly be blamed for bringing it about by the neglect or abuse of our social relations. By inaction or indirection, by influence, conscious or unconscious, as well as by direct suggestion and prompting, we may render ourselves guilty of sins we do not personally commit. Our name is not disclosed, nor is our reputation smirched, and we expose ourselves to no penalties; yet all the while we are implicated in great transgression, are sleeping partners in unrighteousness. In writing to the Church at

Rome, St. Paul gives a long specification of sins and sinners, and then adds: "Who, knowing the ordinance of God, that they which practise such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but also consent with them that practise them." In our text the Apostle is not speaking of these desperate sinners, but of respectable men, who do *not* "do the same," and who do *not* "consent with them that practise" the various vices, yet who nevertheless are implicated in the sins from which they are personally free, and which, as a matter of fact, they indignantly denounce. Walter Savage Landor gives it as a curious feature of life in the Philippines that the most peaceful tribe was the one that made the fighting implements for the warrior tribes. This anomaly of native life is perpetually being repeated in civilised society, where in a variety of ways men belie their profession and become implicated in actions altogether at variance with their reputation. Such is the complexity of life, such the deceitfulness of sin.

The age in which we live is peculiarly favourable to this personal effacement. In past days the several members of society were far more distinct and outstanding than they are now; as one might say, they were called by their own name, they lived and traded under their own signature. It is otherwise now when collectivism to so large an extent replaces individualism.

Such are the elaborations and intricacies of society that the individual is readily merged in unions, boards, corporations, combines, trusts, and freemasonries generally. We may participate in every conceivable iniquity, yet not once appear: abetting the sin and avoiding the odium, enjoying the pleasure and evading the penalty, sharing in the plunder and reviling the thief. Now the clearer apprehension of these subtle articulations existing within the body politic ought not to diminish our sense of personal responsibility, but rather to heighten it. Instead of blinding ourselves by the spectacle of numbers, we ought to feel how the delicate interlinkings of modern civilisation make our influence felt through the vast organism, and immensely extend the sphere of personal responsibility.

Sins committed by proxy bring upon the principal the full guilt and retribution pertaining to such sins. We have an illustration of this in the instance of the death of our Lord. In his sermon on the day of Pentacost, St. Peter proceeded: "Him, being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye *by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay.*" So far as the deed of the crucifixion was concerned it was executed by the Roman. But the Apostle does not attempt to make the guilt of the Cross to reflect upon Pilate, Herod, Cæsar, or the soldiers who were the immediate execution-

ers; he charges the full guilt of the heinous deed upon the Jewish people. It was done by "the hand" of the Gentile, but the foul act was instigated by the Hebrew, and he was the soul of the dread transaction. Therefore, passing by the puppets and instruments, the faithful preacher laid the guilt of Calvary on the Sanhedrim. "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom *ye* crucified." In reality they wove the crown of thorns, planted the cross, drove the nails, pointed the spear, and their retribution was rather intensified than softened by the fact that their evil counsel was carried out by the hand of the stranger. So is it ever. The mechanical agent is quite a secondary party, although he may not be an innocent one; the prime sinner is he who actuates, facilitates, and then robs or stabs by "the hand of lawless men." Human law can very often only see "the hand," and penalise it; but Heaven knows the greed, malice, or wrath that moves "the hand" and determines the deed of wickedness.

In *Church Life* we must take heed to the admonition before us. Whatever may be the exact exposition of the text, its main teaching is manifest, that we are individually responsible for the faith and purity of the Church. And when we speak of the faith and purity of the Church,

we are not speaking of two things, but of one. In the Old Testament, idolatry is rarely if ever discussed in the abstract; it is invariably associated with immorality; a lapse into idolatry means an epoch of licentiousness; and after the same manner the New Testament regards heresy as moral rather than intellectual. A heretic is one whose doctrinal speculations threaten ethics. "Whosoever goeth onward" (taketh the lead, heralds a forward movement), "and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son. If any one cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into your house, and give him no greeting: for he that giveth him greeting partaketh in his evil works" (2 John 9-11). Any departure from the teaching of Christ is sooner or later damned by its consequences; and keeping ourselves free from those who depart from sound teaching we shall not share their guilt.

The purity of the Church is a grand item of our stewardship, to be guarded severely. "Keep *thyself* pure." First of all we must maintain our personal loyalty to the faith, for any looseness on our part soon makes itself felt. Christian people sometimes come to think and speak depreciatingly of orthodoxy; they nibble at this or the other vital doctrine, forgetting how such lightness may seriously and even fatally affect

others who are perhaps less instructed or experienced than themselves. Unbelief has its responsibilities; it is a serious thing to unsettle or relax a man's faith, on the integrity of which so much depends; and every true disciple of Christ will be careful lest he give away the inch of belief that tempts weaker brethren to take an ell, or perchance a good many ells. We must be cautious, too, about giving tacit sanction to latitudinarianism. We sometimes see Christians who themselves hold by "the things most surely believed amongst us," manifest excessive tenderness toward the ringleaders of heresy, and they are ready to excuse and defend pseudo-Christians who have gone utterly astray from the faith once delivered to the saints. The motive of such forbearance may be admirable, but it is not the less erroneous and pernicious. It is supposed to be called for by Christian charity; yet St. Paul and St. John, who knew a great deal about charity, knew nothing certainly about this tolerance. What about charity toward the thousands who may be misled? Is there no cruelty in unsettling the faith that has created the saints, made our Christian households, and which is the basis and strength of popular righteousness? The victims of the doctrines of notoriously false teachers ought to be the objects of our concern and sympathy. These are robbed far more than enriched, and our solicitude should be chiefly on

their behalf. Giving an indirect patronage to anti-Christian doctrine and teachers we share the guilt of those who destroy the foundations, and become partakers of their plagues. Not from indifference, weakness, or policy must we tolerate those beginnings of unbelief and laxity in the Church of God, which, like specks in fruit, spread to a total rottenness.

Our *social influence* must be vigilantly guarded. Persons accepted by the community as respectable and honourable may be implicated in sins that seem a long way from them, and which they actually deplore. Certain writers contend that society is afflicted only by such criminals as it creates and deserves. They hold that in manifold ways the community makes the sin possible, makes it unavoidable, and the criminal who is punished is simply the scapegoat, bearing the sin of many. If absolute justice were done, society would be executed and the convict officiate as hangman. This view of the case is palpably exaggerated. After all, individual responsibility is too serious a truth to be wholly lost sight of after this fashion. Nevertheless, this extreme view contains a measure of truth not to be disregarded. We may act with such thoughtlessness, hardness, and selfishness, with such injustice, unfairness, and inhumanity, as, so far as our personal influence extends, to render certain vices and crimes almost inevitable. By indifference,

greed, and harshness, it is possible to drive out unfortunate fellows into terrible situations, and expose them to overwhelming temptation. The vast multitude of inconsiderable offenders create an electric atmosphere, and the prisoner at the bar is the victim of the lightning flash. It is "the crowd behind that pushes," complain the badly-placed who get under the horses' feet and the batons of the police; and there is some reasonableness in their plea. They are not without responsibility for being where they are; but the intense and concentrated eagerness of the mass creates the momentum which occasions the catastrophe. We should be surprised and indignant were an attempt made to commit us for conspiracy, and to handcuff us with convicts; yet a close analysis might prove that by roundabout ways we have contributed more than we think to notorious offences. Yes, it must be acknowledged; one perishes in his iniquity, but the great Assize will show how many shared in the guilt who did not share in the punishment.

"Keep thyself pure." In respect to our own individual life we must be faithful. The more we reflect, the more clearly is it seen how little in our life is purely personal and private. In one of Lafcadio Hearn's letters occurs the following: "A queer Buddhist idea was given to me the other day. The idea is this:—Do not be angry or indulge secretly any wicked thought!

Why? Because the anger or the wicked thought, though secret and followed by no action, *may go out into the universe as an unseen influence and therein cause evil.* In other words, a man might be responsible for a murder committed at a great distance by one whom he does not even know. Weak, unbalanced minds, trembling between crime and conscience, may be decided suddenly to evil by the straw weight of an unseen influence." The Buddhist has apprehended vividly the solidarity of the race and the reality of a community of thought and feeling. Are not our tentative experiments in thought-reading and thought-transference a recognition of the same fact and a feeling after its laws? Enough for us that there exists a reaction of souls, and even our unexpressed thoughts and emotions have a social character and influence. The influence we exert over one another in the home is conspicuously apparent. The sons of Eli made themselves vile, and Eli was not blameless. Through neglect, weakness, harshness, we may unhappily prejudice our children and become partakers in their sins. In regard to public life we have grave responsibility. Citizens who neglect imperial and municipal duties become chargeable with the sins they do nothing to prevent. And in the wide range of social obligation we must be conscientious, or we shall be found guilty of vicarious wickedness. Refrain from whatever might

prompt wrong-doing, from whatever would facilitate it, from whatever would countenance or excuse it. Let the strong bear the burden of the weak; let none put a stumbling-block in his brother's way.

In *business life* it is necessary to beware of entanglements. It is possible personally to keep well within the lines of legality, and yet to be sharers in crimes we should be first to disavow. Dickens in "Great Expectations" pictures a clever swindler who used a poor creature for purposes of unlawful gain, and then left him in the hands of the police. But without this intentional gross treachery, the spirit in which we administer our business and the mode of carrying it out may unhappily influence others, whilst the principal escapes criticism. Or we may go farther. Only recently it was explained how professional burglars secure a perfect mechanical outfit. They know exactly where to procure a "jemmy," or a device for safe-drilling, or any of the many tools used by the cracksman in pursuit of his calling. It appears that most of the tools used in burglaries are made by mechanics who pass in the community as respectable men. When a burglar requires a particular tool he hies to a mechanic who can do the job, and who receives perhaps five times what the thing is worth for making the instrument and holding his tongue. Of course this instance is of a crude

and vulgar type; but this kind of fraudulent partnership and policy may be carried out with endless sophistications and refinements in the transactions of ordinary business.

The "respectable mechanic" is not prosecuted together with the burglar, yet the theft were impossible without the mutuality. The respectable smith does not go to jail; most probably he takes himself off to a picnic; perhaps he even goes to church; but he ought to go to Wormwood Scrubs. He is implicated in every robbery, in every act of violence and murder in which his handiwork plays a part, and he ought to be put upon his trial as an accessory before the act. In the intricate relations of business, many fill the place of the "respectable mechanic." They are the astute managers who make schemes of spoliation possible, who contrive and adjust the whole machinery of duplicity, who secure to themselves the substantial gains, and who yet never once appear. Whenever a crimson sinner stands in the dock, be sure that a nice company of pink sinners sprinkle the court. Gambling is perhaps the most glaringly ruinous iniquity of our times. Society is honeycombed by it. It is the source of a thousand evils and miseries. It is responsible for forgeries, embezzlements, suicides. It is the destroyer of families, reputations, souls. What, then, shall be said of those who derive large revenues from

sporting newspapers? who entice their readers to destruction by glittering temptations? No casuistry can get rid of the fact that these capitalists are the "respectable mechanics" who equip the housebreaker. They do not stand at the bar with the thief, yet are they equally guilty, perhaps more so.

"Keep thyself pure." The day approaches when all corporations will be broken up, when the names of all sleeping partners will be called out, and "every one shall give an account of himself unto God."

XII

THE SNARE OF SLIPSHOD

And let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing.—JAMES i. 4.

THE text is a plea for thoroughness in Christian character and life. We are not to grow weary, nor to suspend our great work at any point short of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. It is not enough that we possess the main elements of goodness and carry on the work of grace to some intermediate stage of development; we must covet every grace, and pursue each grace to its last perfection. In effect St. James says, Nothing pertaining to character and duty is trivial, therefore omit nothing, and then conscientiously and lovingly give everything the last touch.

Art teaches the vital importance of the delicate touch, the final caress. Every one knows the anecdote which records how, when Michael Angelo was pointing out to a visitor certain details of a picture as adding to its merit, the great artist was met by the objection: "These are only trifles." "Yes," replied the master, "and trifles make perfection, but perfection is no

trifle." Painters, sculptors, architects, jewellers, as well as literary artists, thirst for perfection, and leaving the first principles of their art with infinite patience seek the ideal. In their reckoning nothing that concerns the perfection of their work is immaterial; trifles light as air are to them of absorbing consequence. The magic of a beautiful object is at last conferred by a touch, and the craftsmen study night and day to impart that touch.

Science teaches the same lesson of the indispensability of the obscure detail. It may be true, as Darwin suggests, that absolute perfection is rarely if ever found in nature; but it is entirely incorrect to say that nature is ever rough-and-ready in her operations. Her lack of an ideal perfection is strictly a consequence of her practical perfection. The life, beauty, and fruitfulness of beast, bird, or flower are known by the naturalist to be dependent upon minute features which altogether escape the notice of ordinary observers. Formations and colours only revealed by the microscope are matters of life and death in the kingdom of nature.

In all its departments the modern is intent on reaching what is perfect and entire, lacking in nothing. As civilisation grows we insist that crudeness can no longer be tolerated; work of all kinds must be executed fittingly, exquisitely, accurately, perfectly. This spirit of thorough-

ness dominates the medical world. The physician aims to carry the spirit of refinement, precision, and painstaking into every branch of his profession; absolute cleanliness and delicacy must mark all his treatment. This temper of severe finish is equally manifest in the mechanical sphere. We have only to peep into an engineering journal to learn of the infinite pains taken to secure absolute truth and accuracy in all that pertains to enginery and tools. This is not less the case in the industrial world. The successful manufacturer or merchant of to-day cannot conduct his business in a journeyman fashion; he concentrates himself on coming as nearly to perfection as possible in the agents he employs, the methods he adopts, and the goods he creates or barters. With advancing knowledge and aspiration the passion grows for exactitude and thoroughness. Rough-and-ready gives place to jeweller's scales, to balances that will weigh perfumes; the rule of thumb is superseded by gauges which measure to the fraction of a hair's breadth. We ironically smile at pavement artistry and trample it under feet, whilst we strive for perfection with the solicitude of a master finishing the picture which is to establish his fame.

Are we equally in earnest for perfection in character? Few will affirm it. We content ourselves with being "right in the main," although

that is a very dubious phrase so long as the "main" does not display itself in the particular. We console ourselves by the reflection that "the root of the matter is in us," although that assumption is doubtful until the root demonstrates itself in leaf, blossom, and fruition throughout all the branches of the tree. The fact is we permit slipshod in our spiritual life and in its unfolding as we permit it nowhere else. We are aware of irregularities that we make only faint efforts to correct; we perpetually fail in temper and conduct, leaving the causes of such failure untouched; we are conscious of wants that we make little effort to supply. The passion for perfection displayed in so many other directions is lacking here. With all our deficiencies and imperfections we trust that *we shall do*. The essential principles and virtues are possessed by us; but we are content to stop short of the full force, richness, beauty, and effectiveness of the Christian character. The greatest work of all is scamped, and all too readily we condone it.

1. How much is lost by permitting the spirit of slipshod in relation to our interior life! We read concerning Amaziah, King of Judah: "And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart" (2 Chron. xxv. 2). Might not many Christians be thus described? Whilst we pass muster amongst the saints, and God in His compassion still

counts us among His children, what secret faults are allowed! There is faintness in our faith, lapses into pride and selfishness, motions of lasciviousness, hidden idolatries, subtle relics of the carnal nature and the old life. These tainted remainders are allowed to linger, to burrow and nestle, to affect motive, emotion, sympathy, purpose; and, although vividly alive to their presence, we far too readily excuse them. Like Amaziah, we do what is right in the sight of the Lord; but all the while obscure roots of bitterness survive, tainting, enfeebling, marring much that we are and do. Now this lack of truth in the inward parts is a serious defect indeed. A soldier told me the other day that the essential of accurate shooting is absolute cleanliness of the rifle barrel. He explained how a rifle is liable to fouling by particles of the bullet adhering to the bore of the rifle. This fouling is practically imperceptible to the naked eye, nor can the minute particles be detected by the ordinary process of cleaning. Yet these subtle metallic adhesions, however few, are fatal to really accurate shooting. They will deflect a bullet as much as three or four inches out of its course in a range of two hundred yards. As the Bisley bull's-eye is only four inches in diameter at that range, it follows that many a shot misses the centre, that many a prize is lost, because of the fouling of the barrel by these invisible particles.

"Sin" is, literally, missing the mark. How often, then, have we missed our aim when we thought to reach the divine purpose concerning us, because of the deflecting power of some bias of the heart! How often, when we purposed to act according to Christian manhood, has some unworthy passion betrayed us into failure! How often, when we thought to win the highest prizes of the Spirit, have we failed to find the target because soilings of the dust, motes of self, specks of uncleanness, metallic particles of greed, films of vanity, have thwarted our honest intent! Fragments of the world, spots of the flesh, darling sins that lurk out of sight, rob us of success, send us away brooding over painful failures in character and action. The King's daughter must be all glorious within, if her clothing is to remain wrought and untarnished gold. Secret sins, invisible except to closest scrutiny, are full of danger, although too often we regard them as practically negligible. Let us, then, be jealous for the inner purity and glory, sedulously guarding against any fouling of the imagination, affections, or purpose. Let us consider nothing immaterial in our mental, physical, or spiritual nature, lest it deflect our judgment or design. Let the eye be single, the heart true, the aim steady. Nothing is a trifle that mars the integrity of the soul. Perfect purity of heart is Christ's ideal; let it be mine. Let the Kingdom of God be established

to the utmost borders of my being. And having so done we must cry: "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

2. How much is lost by permitting the spirit of slipshod in relation to character! What many thoughtlessly regard as a minor defect is really a capital defect. If one falls short, just short, of perfect truthfulness of spirit and speech, how much it means! Looseness, inaccuracy, exaggeration, or suppression in statement or promise, brands one with a most undesirable reputation, although otherwise he has a score of fine qualities. "Verily, verily, I say unto you." To miss this teaching may seem of light import to men who reckon words as light; but the suspicion of unveracity destroys much good, it is in a Christian what a flaw is in a diamond. A defect in kindliness is voted by many as the merest infirmity, yet does it obscure rare virtues. Many Christian men govern their homes by reason and their business by conscience; but staying short of courtesy and grace, a sentimentalism they affect to despise, no one likes them. They are proud of their Roman virtues of integrity, probity, equity, sobriety, and think it of little moment to leave the granite unpolished. They will tell you that they care nothing for the embroideries of life; and the fact is that the charm is largely in

the embroideries, although these count for little if the fundamental principles are not under them. Unless virtue rises into poetry it is minus the magic, however sterling it may be. Wanting in honour and honesty even in the slightest degree is fatally to dim the most illustrious character. Honour is not uncommonly the only religion of godless men, and the grandest faith is painfully compromised that does not produce it. Christians who tardily and shufflingly discharge their obligations destroy their reputation and influence, although they are shining lights in sobriety and charity. An infirmity of temper is popularly counted a mere peccadillo, but not by those who suffer through it. A crabbed or peppery saint is immensely discounted, although otherwise he is a walking decalogue. A big pot of ointment is spoiled by a very small fly.

When St. James writes, "Be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing," he is dealing throughout with practical virtues and duties. He treats of the government of the tongue, of humility, charity, and brotherliness. He is eloquent concerning temper, equity, and unity. It is on this practical side that he views the matter, and at every point urges completeness and excellence touched to finest issues. "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, is guilty of all." And he will be satisfied with nothing short of that practical perfection which

is ever possible to sincerity, heartiness, and diligence, and which can be sooner attained than defined. On the Continent we remember to have seen a cathedral famous for its magnificence; but just as we were leaving the verger showed us a bit of scamped work covered up by a workman centuries ago. Years have passed since we saw the sight, but never do we recall the splendour of that shrine without memory thrusting on our view the unfortunate blemish. St. James appreciated the damaging power of a single defect in character, of a single scar upon an otherwise blameless reputation. The prize rose gains its distinction by a leaf, and the Christian is winsome and powerful in the last degree by virtue of "lacking in nothing."

In the Old Testament in the records of the kings how frequently does that depreciating word "nevertheless" occur! "The heart of Asa was perfect with the Lord all his days, nevertheless the high places were not removed." So with Jehoshaphat, so with Jehoram. Alas for these drawbacks in character, these gaps in obedience! What a world of beauty they hide! What music they jar! What fine gold they tarnish! We may dismiss these defects with levity; but in committing such apparently venial offences it is as though you plucked the scarlet feather from the breast of the robin, brushed the prismatic powder from the butterfly's wing, or de-

stroyed with a touch the bloom of the peach. That last charm gone, the full glory and joy of Christian character and experience are no more.

Let us not forget the peril that attends the minor defect, the shortcoming with which we are apt to deal so tenderly. We are tempted to pass by these defects as foibles attendant on our frailty; yet are they fraught with utmost danger. Writers on natural history insist on the immense "survival value" of faint features in bird or beast. An authority on this matter, after having remarked on the slight markings, scintillations, and colourings of creatures, proceeds: "It may be objected, and truly, that such deceptions as this are of only momentary effect. But the reader should realise, in this case and in all kindred ones, that it is just these tiny, trivial seeming moments that often tip the balance toward escape or capture, toward life or death, in an animal's career. The predatory animals and the animals they prey upon have been developed together, and their powers of capture or escape inter-adjusted to a nicety. . . . In any case, it is obvious that, as things stand today, the very smallest items in aid either of the hunters or the hunted must be of vital importance. Eagles and tigers are not more clever at *catching* than their quarries are at *escaping;* hence the slightest additional aid may save a quarry's life. Just such an aid is the momentary

deception effected by the contrary movement of a spot of iridescence, as described above. Hindered but for an instant, the pursuer may be wholly balked, for that instant may enable the quarry to slip into cover, or take wing, just in the nick of time."*

Now just as the life of the animal depends upon the momentary effect of a stripe, a shining feather, a glittering spot; so our moral salvation may depend upon what presumptuous ignorance would dismiss as a negligible trifle. The last perfection of faith—love, temper, pureness, sobriety, or meekness—ensures rare immunity; but the minute lack of perfectness is a spot where rottenness sets in, a weak place where disease breeds, a joint in our armour where the arrow pierces, an inviting handle which the adversary grips. If any one objects that God will not permit the destiny of immortal souls to turn on trifles, the answer is ready: there are no trifles in the moral world, and the most fatal of mistakes is to think that there are. "I will no more speak much with you, for the prince of the world cometh: and he hath nothing in Me." *"Nothing!"* Here is the impregnable defence, the absolute immunity. The last touch has a "survival value" of enormous significance. "We know that whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not;

* Thayer's "Concealing Coloration in the Animal Kingdom."

but he that was begotten of God keepeth him, and the evil one toucheth him not."

How shall we attain this perfectness? As the Spirit of Christ dwells in us, and as we live in His daily fellowship. Let us live as under His eye, ever strengthened by His inspiration. Sir Joshua Reynolds, addressing his students, said, "Consider with yourself, how a Michael Angelo or a Raffaelle would have treated this subject; and work yourself into a belief that your picture is to be seen and criticised by them when completed. Even an attempt of this kind will rouse your powers." If we live thus under the eye of Christ and anticipate His coming, what will it not do for us!

XIII

THE SAFEGUARDED LIFE

Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe, and shall have respect unto Thy statutes continually.—Ps. cxix. 117

THROUGHOUT this long psalm the singer reveals a vivid consciousness of the difficulties and perils of the heavenly pathway, and of his personal insufficiency to deal with them. The text is the language of one who felt that he could not hold himself up. Sooner or later all sincere souls prove this. In the pride of the heart we boast of self-sufficiency, but the unsparing pressure of life and bitter failure in critical hours teach the indispensability of wisdom and strength beyond our own. Self-reliance is essential to every one of us; only the self-reliance that falls back on the presence and fellowship of God will suffice to carry us unhurt through the fiery trial. Note, then, our main sources of security.

We are secured against the temptations of life by the vision of the highest things and by our delight in them. When standing on hazardous ground we are frequently more secure looking at what is above rather than by anxiously survey-

ing the depths below us; and such is the divine method of our spiritual salvation. "He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them which hated me: for they were too strong for me." Salvation is "from above"; obsessed by high things, and by the highest, we are delivered in the hour and power of darkness. Sometimes ethical teachers think to consult our safety by fixing our attention on the abysses of shame and misery into which it is so easy for human nature to drop; but whilst shuddering glances into the depths may prove admonitory, revelation chiefly seeks to safeguard by inspiring great ideas, presenting high examples, supplying pure pleasures, opening golden vistas. Set your affections, thoughts, desires, on the good, the worthy, the beautiful, is the constant exhortation of the Scriptures. In "the heavenlies"—in noble ideas, ambitions, and delights—our safety is secure.

In ascending the lofty peaks of the Jungfrau and Monte Rosa, the guides are said not infrequently to resort to the artifice of endeavouring to interest the traveller in the beauty of the lovely flowers growing there, with a view to distract his attention from the fearful abysses which the giddy path overhangs. By a similar device of wisdom and love are the saints preserved as they pursue their perilous way. God establishes

their steps by charming their eye with things of beauty, interest, and delectableness, and by filling their heart with the love of them. Home, sweet home, with its pleasantness and pathos; the charm of literature, the miracles of science, the spell of music, the visions of art; the daily round, with its ever fresh solicitudes and satisfactions; the calls of patriotism, the demands of duty, the glow of love, the pleasures of friendship, social service, the abandon of pastimes—these, and many other similar things pertaining to the natural life, when accepted, exercised, and enjoyed in the sunshine of the Lord, constitute our strength and guarantee our peace, despite all the visions of sin, all the allurements of world, flesh, and devil. We are not saved by some unknown magic, but God draws our heart to Himself through the sanctified gifts, situations, and activities which go to the making up of human life. Here is our impregnable defence. These are the guardian angels which bear us up in their hands, lest at any time we dash our foot against a stone; these the shining squadrons of our salvation. Absorbed by the chaste and lovely things of legitimate life, we become oblivious of the yawning depths, and are then most secure when most oblivious.

A writer denounces "the lust-exasperating asceticisms of Roman Catholicism that create temptation." Such an estimate of much asceti-

cism is not too severe. It positively provokes the evil it is proposed to cure. By fixing the thought on forbidden things it induces a dangerous unhealthiness of the soul, and invests the illegitimate with a weird fascination more seductive than such things possess when presented in actual life, or even when pictured in immoral poetry and romance. Emerson is altogether sane when he writes: "The order of things consents to virtue. Such scenes as luxurious poets and novelists often paint, where temptation has a quite overcoming force, never or very rarely occur in real life." And we may add, when they do occur there are present certain wholesome preservatives which always attend reality. But to the ascetic the lust-exasperating privation is devoid of the tonics which so largely guarantee human life. The glamour of the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them are felt nowhere more than by the anchorite in the wilderness. Delilah tortures the saints in the monastery far more than she endangers the saints in Vanity Fair. The purple of pride appears purplest to the wearer of a hair-shirt. The splendour and luxury of Belshazzar's feast hardly equal the baneful power of the vision of voluptuousness which dazzles the inner eye of the ascetic. The philosophy of the Christian faith is altogether different. It ensures our safety not by denials of the evil so much as by the positive power of

the good. We are not restrained by fear, but the joy of the Lord is our strength. Our eye is so filled with the sweet lustre of the right and pure that it turns instinctively from the lurid lights which are gleams of hell.

"Opportunity makes the thief"; and, in truth, opportunity makes most sinners and occasions most sins. But the soul dutifully occupied is gloriously blind to the sinister opportunity. We have no eye for it, no taste for it, it does not appeal to us, we are practically unconscious of it. It is perhaps only years after, and when all peril is past, that we discover how nigh the kingdom of evil came to us, and how entirely the forbidden thing was within our grasp. The dangerous opportunity greedily seized by the vacant or vicious is actually overlooked by the pure in heart, by men and women charmed and satisfied by diviner things. It is not a question of struggle against an enticing bait. The senses fail to discern it, the imagination does not picture it, it is not entertained by the mind, the will is called upon for no decision. Blessed blindness! The faithful shall "not see death"; and, delighting in God and in His gifts, they frequently fail to discern the devil; they obliterate him by the contempt of unconsciousness. "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe." Satisfy me with chaste delights; let me "have respect unto Thy statutes continually"; then shall the tempt-

ing hour or thing pass unrecognised; or, if recognised, it shall remain innocuous, its false glitter outshone by the sheen of diviner callings, felicities, and hopes.

We are secured against the difficulties of life by the strengthening of the soul through grace. Many and serious are the difficulties to be overcome in the working out of our salvation. The heavenly way seems not to follow the line of the least but of the greatest resistance. The path is often rough, steep, dark, dangerous; and, speaking metaphorically, the bleached bones of many pilgrims strew the way, and show how we must fail unless supernatural strength is vouchsafed in our weakness. "Having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace," is the exhortation of St. Paul to the Ephesian Church. The rough work of the climber, the stern marches of the soldier, the exacting routes of the pilgrim, call for careful preparation. Their feet must be encased against the arduous road. So need we careful preparation for life's rough way. There is no royal road to heaven; no path except the crooked, steep, dark one of the common lot. This every saint must traverse, and it demands an equipment of staying power that only the gospel can supply. Without the grace it inspires the obstacles on the upward pathway are simply insurmountable.

Pepys' Diary describes a visit that the writer paid to a shepherd on Epsom Downs. "We

took notice of his wollen-knit stockings of two colours, mixed, and of his feet shod with iron shoes, both at the toes and heels, and with great nails in the soles of his feet, which was mighty pretty; and, taking notice of them, 'Why,' says the poor man, 'the downs, you see, are full of stones, and we are faine to shoe ourselves thus; and these,' says he, '*will make the stones fly till they sing before me.*'" Is not this a figure of the enduement of the saints, and of their triumphant progress on the heavenly road? Verily, by virtue of the divine power with which they are endowed, they not only progress toward the goal, but they "make the stones fly till they sing before them."

This grace prevails when the path is rough and thorny, when it can be followed only with sore or bleeding feet. The human lot is often felt to be cruel; it taxes even heroism to the uttermost to sustain it. How precious, then, in these days is that interior light, confidence, and peace with which the loyal soul is inspired! Instead of being bruised or broken by the savage angles of the ugly stones which thickly strew all the way, the pilgrim "makes the stones fly till they sing before him." Ah! even the cruelest stones of all—the grave-stones—as anyone may see who makes a tour of the churchyard. The promise is triumphantly realised, "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days,

so shall thy strength be." Equally prevalent and precious is that grace when the path is smooth and slippery, for these glacial passages are peculiarly deceptive and perilous. Of the prosperity of the wicked, the psalmist writes: "Surely Thou settest them in slippery places: Thou castest them down to destruction." Denouncing an indulgent priesthood, Jeremiah predicts: "Wherefore their way shall be unto them as slippery places in the darkness: they shall . . . fall therein." Rough places are bitter, dark places affright; but the polished floors of pride and fashion are perhaps more dangerous to the highest life than are the jagged ways so grievous to flesh and blood. Yet here also grace enables us to stand upright. "My steps have held fast to Thy paths, my feet have not slipped." "The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide." "When I said, My foot slippeth; Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up." On rough-hewn routes, rugged causeways, and hazardous crags, where satin slippers are a mockery, and the preparations of ordinary prudence painfully inadequate, grace "steels our ankles" and equips with martial sandals; or, in other words, the Spirit of God pours into our heart a tranquil courage, vanquishing every thwarting thing. And on precarious promenades of fortune and jubilee, where the sinister gleam of the glittering ice so easily betrays, the self-

same Spirit inspires a strength and sobriety that causes our steps to hold fast to His paths.

Not only, however, are we made to stand, but the regimen of severity works the perfecting of our highest being. Naturalists tell us that perhaps the most striking feature of Alpine vegetation as a whole is that the plants are much more compact in build than in the Lowlands. There is a marked absence in them of those features which gardeners term " leggy " or " weedy." Is not the effect of hardship very similar upon character? We become more compact in build, and the deformities and excrescences which are apt to appear on richer soil and in sheltered grounds are checked and eliminated. " Let us rejoice in our tribulations; knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience develops tested strength, and tested strength develops the habit of hope; and hope putteth not to shame." Nay, let us look yet beyond. The stumbling-blocks become altar-stairs, steps to God's throne. The burning marl leads into the golden street; the stones which bruise and gash glow into gems, and fly singing until their music blends with the eternal song. We may confidently declare that the jewelled walls of the New Jerusalem are built up with the mastered difficulties of the saints transfigured into jasper, emerald, and amethyst. Never can we believe that the struggle of life is in vain, and that its

heroisms are unrequited. We fight to conquer, we conquer to reign.

We are secured against the sorrows of life by the consolations and hopes of the gospel. The dark paths of life are full of dread possibilities. The pessimist is satisfied that, if the condition of the race had been just a little worse, and life had been a trifle more terrible, it would have been impossible for it to have been at all. We need not enter into this speculation; but it is visible to all how nearly the tragedy of life lies to melancholy, despair, suicide. The fatalities befalling us are real and manifold. Our beauty consumes as when a moth fretteth a garment. Reason often with difficulty keeps her seat. We are so nearly convinced of the absolute vanity of life as to be ready to treat it with cynical contempt. Ghastly disease, speechless anguish, the strokes of misfortune, death's divorces, and a thousand nameless stings and sorrows are well calculated to extinguish our joy and pride. Travellers tell of that awful morgue on the summit of the St. Bernard, all of whose ghastly tenants perished in the same way—the victims of the storm-fiend, crushed by the avalanche, overwhelmed by the blizzard, frozen by the cold. But, if such a thought is lawful, what would be the overwhelming spectacle of a morgue presenting at a glance the sad faces, the blasted lives, the broken hearts, of even a single generation;

countless men, women, and children, victims of the avalanche, the hurricane, the night, and the frost, which constitute the tragedy of human life.

The poignancy and magnitude of human suffering can be neither denied nor ignored; to be dealt with effectually it must be transcended. This the faith of Christ accomplishes. Very wonderful is the power of emotion to render us oblivious of bodily suffering, as the soldier in the fury of battle may be insensible of his wounds, or as martyrs in an ecstasy have found the stake a bed of roses; very wonderful, too, is the power of the mind to antagonise misfortune and render men impervious to cruel losses. By consoling and fortifying the soul in the highest degree does the faith of Christ render us invincible in the days of darkness. Against mighty sorrows and dread possibilities it sets the strong consolations and glorious hopes of the gospel of redemption, sanctification, and immortality. Just as we get and keep firm hold of these doctrines do we bear our sorrows with dignity, tranquility, and the air of a conqueror. A Figure full of majesty and grace dawns upon the morgue that the pessimist depicts, converting it into a house of mercy, a hospital of healing, a chamber of peace, a gate of heaven. Only He can sustain, but He can. Here is the strong staff and the beautiful rod which do not fail in the

wildest storm, in the most savage pass, in the darkest valley. "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God." And comforted by Him, the measure of the storm is of the least consequence.

"Now unto Him who is able to guard you from stumbling, and to set you before the presence of His glory without blemish in exceeding joy, to the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and power, before all time, and now, and for evermore. Amen."

XIV

SEALED ORDERS: THE INLAND VOYAGE

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed to go out unto a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.—HEB. xi. 8.

NAVAL, military, and other officers are accustomed to receive sealed instructions from the authorities by whom they are sent forth, which are not to be opened until they reach a given spot or after a given lapse of time. They leave their home, most probably their native land, and go forth in blind obedience, patiently anticipating the breaking of the seal. It was thus in the instance before us. Abraham, dwelling in Mesopotamia, received a divine call to go forth from Ur of the Chaldeans to some unknown country that God would show him. The call must have sounded strange; much about it was mysterious; in many ways it must have been unwelcome; but the patriarch instantly consented in will and act. "He went out, not knowing whither he went." He had not the faintest notion whither God was leading him; yet in blind confidence he followed the

gleam, migrated to an unknown region, accepted a life of exile, being inwardly assured that the divine purpose would in due season be made manifest and justify itself.

What, then, we now design to show is that, so far as this present life is concerned, we also are similarly called to go forth, quite unconscious of our destination, and that we have strong reasons to do so in hope and confidence. God has a plan concerning us which He does not all at once reveal, which perhaps at any time He only partially reveals; life demands momentous ventures, it is a series of leaps in the dark. Born into this world, we enter with an untried self upon an untried life. Millions have preceded us; yet we are singular and solitary as though the very first to burst upon the mysterious sea. And truly life is a mysterious sea. When a modern ship sets forth on a voyage, it carries with it a chart of marvellous completeness and accuracy, exhibiting the various soundings of the deep; whilst all along the coast are lighthouses with their distinctive signals; so that seamanship is now reduced to something like the certainty and precision of mechanical processes. Human life is not a voyage after this sort. Rather is it like the setting forth of Columbus and the old navigators, who minus chart or beacon dared unknown seas. From the very beginning we are called to places, duties, and

relationships entirely strange to us. The education of the boy proceeds on lines leading he knows not where. The youth determines on a vocation, without being able to give any clear reason for his preference. Young men and maidens choose their partners, and with all flags flying set sail on a misty sea, dimly comprehending their venture. So through all the years we are determined to appointments and migrations of whose motive and bourne we know little more than do birds of passage of their mysterious flight. Yet have we profound reasons to believe that life is wisely ordered and governed to high ends.

A testimony of consciousness assures us of this. Goethe's "Conversations with Eckermann" contains a remarkable passage illustrative of this point. Referring to the translation of one of his books, the philosopher proceeds: "We have, as you know, been busy with this translation for more than a year; a thousand hindrances have come in our way; the enterprise has often come to an absolute standstill, and I have often cursed it in silence. But now I can do reverence to all these hindrances; for during these delays things have ripened abroad among other excellent men, so that they now bring the best grist to my mill, advance me beyond all conception, and will bring my work to a conclusion which I could not have imagined a year ago.

The like has often happened to me in life; and in such cases one is led to believe in a higher influence, in something dæmonic, which we adore without trying to explain it further." Here a pure rationalist confesses the existence of a higher influence dominating life to better issues; and down from the classic ages the greatest of men have been haunted by this consciousness. Do we not all share in this consciousness? We are surprised, annoyed, perplexed, saddened, by the apparently untoward happenings of life, when a sudden gleam shoots across the soul, lights up the darkness, and we realise in the clearest sense that all is right, all is for the best.

Of late years psychologists have been deeply interested in what they call the subliminal; that is, they believe themselves to have discovered a realm of thought and emotion below consciousness, a latent world of supposed sensations, memories, and reasonings, so faint and obscure that we are hardly sensible of them, whilst yet they are very influential in decision and conduct—the blind under side of the brain. But while we think of a realm below consciousness affecting actual life, may we not with greater reason believe in a realm above consciousness, which, although exceedingly faint and perplexing, powerfully asserts itself in our determinations and action? If the dark under side of the brain is a factor of consequence in our psychical life, may not the mystical upper side be irradiated by

skyey influences of yet far greater moment? "And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself." We do not put our ear to the ground for the chief mandates. Whatever may influence from below, it is from above the tree-tops, the heights, that the divinity which shapes our ends whispers and works. If, then, a philosopher like Goethe, whom none will suspect of superstition, was conscious of a supernatural agency ordering his life, a mysterious power "which he adored without trying to explain it further"; need we wonder that spiritually-minded men, men with developed spiritual faculty and sympathy, are often conscious of a leading they adore because they know it to be the guiding hand of their Heavenly Father?

> And here at times a sentinel
> That moves about from place to place,
> And whispers to the worlds of space,
> In the deep night, that all is well.

Modern science confirms our belief that the individual life is governed by divine law to some worthy end. The greatest living scientist has recently published a considerable work, in which he states his final conviction that the universe is manifestly the creation of supreme intelligence, and that we and all things bear marks of superintending reason and purpose. If this view is

correct concerning the universe as a whole, the same science teaches that it is not less true of the most apparently inconsiderable portions of the universe. The law that shapes the planet moulds the dewdrop; the omniscence that governs the heavens is revealed in the molecule, the atom, the electron; the purpose that dominates the movement of empire determines the fortunes of the humblest citizen. Nay, so far is science from extolling magnitudes that it teaches rather that the importance of a thing increases with its littleness. St. Paul, in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, writing of the Christian Church as the body of Christ, declares that those very organs which seem of the least consequence are really indispensable; and that the parts of the body which we regard as the more ignoble are adorned with the more special grace. The Creator has made a composite whole of the organism, assigning special honour to what was obscure and apparently inferior. Has not modern science been busy illustrating the corresponding principle in nature, showing the indispensability of the obscure, the infinitude of the minute, the power and beauty of the feeble?

Reading history, we are dazed by the spectacle of empires, races, and ages, of kings, conquerors, and statesmen, and we begin to wonder where the ordinary individual comes in, so completely is he overshadowed; but turning to science and

noting its strong emphasis on the particle, we recover our reverence for the person and our sense of wonder at the part he plays unseen in the mighty drama of universal history. If, amid billions of entities and movements, each atom has its place, each mote its mission, each vibration its message, is it not easy to believe in the high place and calling of the humblest servant of God and of humanity? If such is the solicitude of nature that she never loses sight of a grain of dust, can we believe that the Father of our spirits will allow one of His children to become the sport of chance and the prey of oblivion?

Robert Louis Stevenson explains himself thus to a correspondent: "Perhaps you would be inclined to say by the kindness of Providence; I would beg you to be done for ever with such partial fancies. The world, the universe, turns on vast hinges, proceeds on a huge plan: you, and we, and—and all, I potently believe it—used for good; but we are all—and this I know—as the dust of the balances. . . . We are the cranks of a huge machine." Now, though we are the dust of the balances, though we are apparently so trivial, has not our science taught us the chief importance of dust and worms? Much nearer the fact is Carlyle, who, in his essay on Burns, writes: "Unfortunately Burns was very poor; had he been even a little richer,

almost never so little, the whole might have issued far otherwise. Mighty events turn on a straw; the crossing of a brook decides the conquest of the world." "The universe turns on vast hinges," cries Stevenson, and in some sense it may be so. "Mighty events turn on a straw," retorts Carlyle; and, as we hold, this more vividly states the fact. Everything seems accidental, and the vastest consequences are precipitated by the most trival occasions and by the most insignificant agents. All science appears to sanction the view that the most inconsiderable persons and deeds are of essential moment in the development of the universal purpose.

The teaching of revelation concerning the ordering of our personal life is most clear and decisive. "Lift up your eyes on high, and see who hath created these, that bringeth out their host by number: He calleth them all by name; by the greatness of His might, and for that He is strong in power, not one is lacking." If, then, according to the prophet, God is thus exact in the catalogue of the stars, not one exempt from His notice and direction, we may confidently infer that not one soul will be left out of the scheme of His government. But our Lord brings it yet more closely to us. "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings? and not one of them is forgotten in the sight of God." That a star does not fall without the notice of the

Creator might seem to some as bearing very distantly on a particular providence over men, for in the reckoning of the cynic a star is far more august than a soul. But when our Lord affirms the significance of the single sparrow, we may be fully satisfied, the cynic notwithstanding, that the single soul will not be overlooked. And all revelation is directed to assure us of the sacredness of the personal life and its fortunes. It boldly and throughout consistently maintains that He whose government comprehends worlds and ages yearns over His frailest child, and never ceases to contemplate his welfare.

We might have supposed that a book which appeals to the race, and which is to last through all time, would have been chiefly occupied with setting forth vast views concerning nations and empires. If we turn to the histories of Egypt, Chaldea, or Assyria, they supply a few particulars of kings and dynasties, yet very rarely does a personal name or history of one of the million emerge. But the Bible teems with names, it is a book of biographies, everywhere pervaded by the sense of personality. Nature may seem careless of the single life, but that is not the characteristic of revelation. The whole Bible is the disclosure of the government of God, designing the salvation and perfection of each and every soul that He has made.

If life sometimes seems to contradict our

faith in Providence, and things do not fall out propitiously as we expected they would, let us not waver in our confidence. The final purpose of the divine government is not to promote our worldly interest nor to secure our creature comfort; it is moral and spiritual. Abraham did not go forth to an unknown land to find gold or diamonds; the motive was religious, and the spiritual ideal may forbid secular ease and prosperity. Untoward circumstance full of friction may be working in us to the highest ends of character. Then, again, the end of life is not selfish aggrandisement or pleasure. Abraham did not leave Mesopotamia in his own interests purely, but in the interest of the race. In every noble life there is a vicarious element often excluding personal ease and pleasantnesses. Finally, the object of life is not present but future advantage. Abraham's eye was fixed on the beyond, and in the strength of what was afar off he made the costly sacrifice. We cannot hope to secure a great future without renouncing present pleasures. If life, then, is often wanting in clearness, smoothness, or successfulness, let us not, therefore, doubt the ordering of God's providence. The lack of smoothness and successfulness may be the very sign of His superintendence, and that He is fulfilling larger purposes than we know. What may be the divine purpose concerning any one in that vast future

awaiting us we cannot guess. For what ministries He is educating us is an absolute mystery. There is a botanical axiom to the effect that the explanation of many features presented by flowers is to be sought for in the fruit. When the gardener considers the flower he wonders why it should have this character or that, apparently strange and purposeless, but the fruit explains the flower; so we may be sure that in the ripened and completed life and service of immortality the enigmas of our present training will find full and delightful solution.

Amid the mystery of this human life, let us, like Abraham, go forth with an assured trust in the generous purpose of God concerning us, and with a firm confidence in the wisdom of His ways. Wherever we see His beckoning hand, whenever we hear His call, let us fearlessly follow on. "A man's goings are established of the Lord; and He delighteth in his way." He is with us. Our times are in His hand. He ordains and sanctifies every trifling detail. Step boldly into the darkness, and prove that it is no darkness at all, only the light of the Lord.

XV

SEALED ORDERS: THE GREAT AND WIDE SEA

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed, to go out unto a place which he was to receive for an inheritance: and he went out, not knowing whither he went.—HEB. xi. 8.

WHATEVER ventures the natural life may demand, it is only when we embark upon the life of the spirit that we put forth into the deep. The spiritual was of the essence of Abraham's action. It was the purpose of the Almighty that the patriarch should found a nation through which ultimately the world's salvation might be attained. Abraham dared to believe in the divine design, wisdom, and faithfulness, and in the result his faith was justified.

The *beginning* of the spiritual life implies a vast venture. The exit of Abraham from his native country did not merely involve a change of locality; its deeper significance lay in the fact that it expressed a sharp severance from the natural life, it was the genesis of an experience of a new and supernatural order. The inmost meaning of the emigration was here, and this

enables us to understand the wrench it involved. Thus interpreted, it impressively represents the difficulty and sacrifice inseparable from initiation into the higher life. To renounce the worldly for the spiritual, the earthly for the heavenly, the temporal for the eternal, is the greatest experiment we may dare. It is to enter a new world, to submit ourselves to the authority of new principles, to obey new motives, to be swayed by new affections, to suffer experiences altogether strange and untried. It is to be born into a new life, whose problems, struggles, duties, sacrifices, and compensations are of such magnitude and mystery that they ought to give one pause. When the day arrives for a decision between the life of the flesh and the life of the spirit, we are perplexed. We have come to the meeting- and wrestling-place between two antagonistic worlds. There is in us a deeply rooted conservatism which causes us to cling to the worldly, to its treasures, enjoyments, friendships, and ambitions; whilst, on the other hand, we feel the powerful claims and drawings of a higher world. But this present world is intimate, familiar, alluring; whilst the spiritual is remote, untested, austere. There is much to attract, much to repel. "And they feared as they entered into the cloud." Why, then, should we renounce the old familiar life of thoughtless ease to grapple with grave problems? Why quit the quiet

haven where we ride at anchor, dreaming between flowery shores, lulled by the soft music of the rippling tide, to obey sealed orders which presage exile, tempest, and battle? Why forgo the sensations of the moment, the serene gratifications of a sensuous and selfish life, for the troubles of the conscience, the exactions of duty, the pains of renunciation, the weariness of the strife for nearly impossible ideals? Better bear the light ills of the superficial life than plunge into sombre experiences that we know not of.

Naturalists tell us of migratory birds which sometimes elect to stay in Cornwall or Devonshire for the winter, rather than risk the passage of the wide sea. They have the sense of a genial clime beyond, of summer landscapes rich with flowers and palms, and of abundance of pleasant food; but they shrink from the perilous journey between them and the land of their dreams, and remain in secluded orchards where heaps of apples are left rotting on the ground. They disobey, they stifle the migratory impulse, and in all probability starve in the snow and perish in the cold. The distracted birds furnish a picture of myriads of men torn and tortured between the impulse which urges them to seek the higher life, and the appetites which lust after the decaying things of time and sense. They yield to the seductions of carnal things, they delay to acquiesce in the strivings of the Spirit,

they are disobedient to the heavenly vision, they outrage their noblest instinct, they linger on the alien shore, and never see the rich lands of the eternal light.

It is quite reasonable that when men are invited to follow a novel path they should inquire: "Where does this lead?" Yet is there not in the case before us a previous question infinitely more imperative than any suggestion of caution? Does truth, right, justice, or love demand this step? If so, we must take it and run all hazards. Stevenson writes: "To do our best is one part, but to wash our hands smilingly of the consequences is the next part of any sensible virtue." So in regard to the claim of consecrated life. If any call comes with authority and persuasiveness, it is this: "Follow thou Me." It is the call of truth, right, justice, and love all in one. Intelligence, conscience, feeling, instantly acknowledge the majesty and grace of the appeal, whether the will responds to it or not. Let us, then, "wash our hands smilingly of the consequences," let us go forth in pure faith, following the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. A great price must be paid for a high ideal, because such an ideal means a great prize. Unforeseen solacements and inspirations, as well as unknown ordeals of faith and patience, await the pilgrim. Hills of vision, lands where the summer glows the year round, cooling brooks, meadows sweet

with flowers, and grateful shadows where the Shepherd leads His flock, lie in the path of all who follow on to know the Lord. With such a Pilot we may well brave the deep. With such a Captain we may well face the foe. With such a Guide we may well dare the wilderness. "Where does it lead?" Yes, where indeed! It may lead through great tribulation, but its goal is altogether gay and golden. "The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall be their Shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life; and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes." As surely as the Almighty brought Abraham into Canaan and gave it him for a possession, so surely will He bring us into that grander heritage of which the earthly Canaan was a faint figure and prophecy.

The *development* of the spiritual life brings crises which call for faith and courage of the highest order. Not only in conversion do we make a daring venture; that is only the first of a series of ventures. The German mystic and poet, Tersteegen, makes this confession: "I have to take care not to settle on the sandbank of selfishness, but to leave all for the Lord to order it. If I then make shipwreck, it will be in the wide sea of God's love, the depths of which are as welcome to me as the surest haven. *But nature fights against the thought of venturing forth we know not where,* out of self into unknown

regions." Urged by an inward necessity to follow the Lord fully, we fear, reason, and hesitate. Nature shrinks from setting forth on a shoreless sea that so rarely knows a sail. We dare not "let ourselves go." We repeatedly deny the inspirations, strivings, beckonings, urgencies, and enthusiasms of the Spirit. "Where will this lead?" Are we to become mystics, visionaries, enthusiasts, fanatics?

Writing of an earthly love and union, Victor Hugo observes that "there are strange hesitations sometimes on the edge of the abyss of happiness." Joy and fear, desire and dread, so strangely mingle that they neutralise one another, and we are powerless to place in our bosom the proffered flower we covet, we shrink from the tendered crown we yet passionately desire. This is certainly true of the heavenly love and aspiration; for when strongly urged to spiritual abandon, to full consecration and sanctification, to possess ourselves of the prize of our high calling, and the most glorious experiences become imminent, our terror balks our desire, and we falter on the edge of *the* abyss of happiness. We recoil from the lyric joy, the seraphic fire, the whole-hearted devotion, the glowing holiness, the delights of sacrifice, the liberty of the glory of the life wholly lived in and for God. Scientists speak of "the law of recession towards mediocrity." That law is certainly very opera-

tive among the saints; we continually compel ourselves to a miserable commonplace, to a sad sobriety. Under this strange infatuation the Church becomes a catacomb of stifled souls.

The "Letters of Dr. John Ker" record a visit he paid to London. "I heard Stopford Brooke. He is clear, natural, forcible, and all that he said was good, 'of Christ living in us by a mighty influence.' All that he said of 'the power that we get from Him for a nobler life' was also true. But he did not speak of the first step, 'the forgiveness of sins,' and his subject should have led him straight to this. The Christ, too, of whom he spoke, might have been a dead Christ, as Plato is to us, not the living Christ, who comes with His Spirit here and now, so that He dwells in the heart, not by metaphor, but in reality. And yet one felt that he believed more than he put into words. The fear these men have of mysticism and superstition, as they call it, and their recoil from the High Church school, makes them broaden their breadth." This is true of the pew as well as the pulpit. We are afraid of exaggeration, of extravagance, of we do not exactly know what; and as the result we restrain and deny the Spirit of God. In the "Elegy in a Country Churchyard," we lament the unrealised possibilities of poets and conquerors who sleep in forgotten graves; but what an elegy might be written concerning the Church

itself, with its unrealised spiritual possibilities of experience, character, and service! We do not give Him liberty who strives to give us liberty, we are afraid to give Him free course who waits to sanctify us wholly; we exhaust half our will-power in resisting the grace that works our perfection. The bud is intimidated by the vermillion, the aroma, the lustre of the rose into which it is being urged; the chrysalis is alarmed by the purple, azure, and dust of gold which glorify the butterfly into which it is being transformed; the eaglet is cowed by the sublime heaven that it is fast becoming competent to cleave. We grasp at false greatness, we shrink from the true. How strange and sorrowful is this disinclination to the fullness of the blessing, this terror of the overflowing cup!

> Lord, I believe: help Thou my unbelief.
> Be for me then against myself. Oh lean
> Over me then when I invert my cup;
> Take me, if by the hair, and lift me up.

Confidently, cheerfully, promptly, let us respond as we are moved by the Holy Ghost. Let us no longer "hug the shore," but set forth in the full assurance of faith on the high seas of the divine fullness. As the providence of God ordains our natural life, and unfailingly conducts it to its completed bourne, so the Spirit of God

superintends the quickening, unfolding, and perfecting of our inner line; and if we are willing in the day of His power, He will lead us into the land of uprightness. Let us trust Him right away to the joy unspeakable, the hope that is full of glory, the purity whiter than snow, the conquest that is more than victory. If, then, in some sense or other through our faith and fervour we make shipwreck, as in olden days Savonarola made shipwreck, or as in modern times William Cowper or John Brown of Osawatomie made shipwreck, it will still be in the wide sea of God's love, where the depths are havens of eternal salvation, and where our very errors and frailties suffer a sea change into something rich and strange.

The *crowning* of the spiritual life in the life everlasting involves a transition calling for strong faith and a dauntless spirit. What a daring setting out is that on the silent sea! "Sealed orders," indeed! We know absolutely nothing of the mighty sphere into which death introduces us; the great deep is veiled in impenetrable mist. Yet have we good reason to embark with holy confidence. Just as the prophetic soul of Columbus saw in various unconsidered facts suggestions of a yet undiscovered world, so thinkers of all ages and climes have found in the structure of the human mind and in the constitution of things the foreshadowings of a future

life. Not that we could be altogether satisfied with these logical and metaphysical grounds for so great a hope. Socrates, in the presence of death, exclaimed: "Would that we could more securely and less perilously sail upon a stronger vessel or some divine word!" As David Purves says: "There is no more pathetic utterance of antiquity than this."* The true soul wistfully scanning the mysterious waste of waters and fancying that it discerned far away the golden isles, and yet not sufficiently sure as to weigh anchor and launch out into the deep! A syllogism is a frail vessel for so tremendous a venture; a metaphysical theory a paper-boat to dare the dread abyss. The cry of Socrates was the cry of humanity before the Advent, even when it could get as far as this.

The coming of the Lord has changed all this. We have found the stronger vessel in which to sail, the divine word has been spoken to assure our heart. The anchor is ours that will neither snap nor drag. The Pilot is ours who perpetrates no shipwreck, and whose face we shall see when the tide which drew from out the boundless deep turns again home. The slippery raft of Socrates' conjecture has been exchanged for the Ark of God that cannot founder. The New Testament teaches with a positiveness and triumph all its own. Have we estimated aright

* "The Life Everlasting."

what this difference between speculation and real knowledge signifies? In fact, it is immense. Some years ago a distinguished London physician in an address to his brethren thus stated the difference between guessing and proof: "As Paley justly puts it, he only discovers who proves. To hit upon a true conjecture here and there, amid a crowd of untrue, and leave it again without appreciation of its importance, is no sign of intelligence. We are told that Thales taught that the sun did not go around the earth, but the earth around the sun. Hence it has been said that Thales anticipated Copernicus—a flagrant fallacy. A crowd of idle philosophers who sat through the long summer days and nights of Attica discussing all things in heaven and earth must sometimes have hit upon a true opinion, if only by accident; but Thales had no reason for his belief. The crude theories of phrenology are not in the least justified by the present knowledge of cerebral localisation; nor do the baseless speculations of Lamarck and Erasmus Darwin entitle them to be regarded as the forerunners of Charles Darwin. Up to 1859 impartial and competent men were bound to disbelieve in evolution. After that date, or at least so soon as the facts and arguments of Darwin and Wallace had been published, they were equally bound to believe in it. He discovers who proves, and by this test Harvey is the sole

and absolute discoverer of the movements of the heart and of the blood."*

"Our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and incorruption to light through the gospel." The reasoning of the physician just quoted bears directly on this passage. Copernicus, Newton, Harvey, Darwin, took the great truths with which their names are for ever identified out of the perplexing and tantalising realm of dreams, demonstrated and established them as vital actualities in the light of day. Before the Advent the conception of immortality was vague; it amounted to little more than an opinion, occasionally rising to something like an educated guess; but in our Lord the illusive theory was translated into an assured doctrine, became a sure and steadfast hope, thus effecting a change similar to the profound one produced by the great intellectual masters when they convert surmises and hypotheses into positive, systematic, and fruitful science. The New Testament has changed groping into vision, impression into conviction, poetry into solid, sober truth that has strengthened generations of dying men to step confidently into the deepest darkness of all.

As we trust God's providence for life's history, the Spirit's grace for the soul's perfecting, so do

* Dr. Pye-Smith.

we trust in the Saviour's promise for all that lies beyond. "Abraham when he was called . . ."—

> Sunset and evening star,
> And one clear call for me.

When it comes, when the last thread that binds to the shore is released and we vanish in the dark, let us obey without a tremor. We have known too much of God's love to doubt it, even on the threshold of worlds unknown.

> I know not where His islands lift
> Their fronded palms in air;
> I only know I cannot drift
> Beyond His love and care.

XVI

MYSTERIOUS FAILURE IN CIRCUMSTANCE

Now for a little while, if need be, ye have been put to grief in manifold temptations, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold that perisheth, though it is proved by fire, might be found unto praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ.—1 PET. i. 6, 7.

THE majority think that they know a fair share of unsuccessfulness, and not a few feel that in one way or another failure has been the salient feature of their days. Unsuccessfulness in business dogs the steps of some; others fail professionally; whilst many feel that all life is one long struggle with difficulty in which they are continually being beaten.

Why some fail in life is not at all difficult to understand. Intellectually they are incompetent for the positions to which they aspire; they undertake the wrong task, or one of too great magnitude. Their failure partakes more of the nature of an error than of a fault. A whole world of what is reckoned failure may be accounted for on the ground of excusable ignorance, miscalculation, or infirmity. Real moral

fault too often explains failure. Sir James Paget, corresponding with one of his sons at the University, writes thus: "I am very sorry for the failures at Christ Church of which you tell. I suspect that cleverness was at the bottom of the failure: for it is a character of mind the exercise of which is so instantly and pleasantly rewarded that the temptation to cultivate it is always present, always diminishing the feeling of need to work with better mental powers for better rewards that are far off. Certainly of all good mental powers, cleverness is the most dangerous, unless it can be held down, even with violence, by some better power, and made a lower servant where else it would be master." Success in every sphere is the reward of prodigious industry; and if we will not pay the price, there is no wonder that we should miss the prize. Conceit, idleness, presumption, account for the humiliation of thousands. Still grosser faults of character and conduct consign multitudes more to the limbo of the inefficient and disinherited. No one inquires into the causes of their defeat; the secret is sufficiently open to all, too well understood by all.

But wise, able, earnest, godly men also fail, fail even disastrously; and these ineffectual members of society in a special degree excite our surprise and compassion. Apparently bringing to their vocation every necessary qualification for

success, they yet seem to come short of it. Naturally such men themselves feel acutely the pathos of their situation. Belonging mainly to the sensitive type, they taste the exceeding bitterness of failure, where it was so desirable that they should succeed, and when it seemed so likely that they would do so. And it is impossible for the spectator to look upon these defeated candidates, left to eat out their own heart, without feeling toward them the same sentiment of sympathy that we feel toward the victims of a grave injustice or mysterious malady.

It is no part of our present design to investigate the various causes of the unsuccessfulness of the defeated who compel our admiration; but, in passing, we may venture to correct two or three misconceptions which prevail concerning these deserving candidates in life's competition. For example, it is a mistake to regard religious faith and feeling as incompatible with practical sense. Genius is thought to unfit its children for secular life; the brilliantly gifted in art and poetry are supposed to be deficient in arithmetic; and by many the religious temper is considered to be still more inconsistent with the world of affairs. Slight observation is necessary to discern that this is not so. Enthusiasts in godliness are far too uniformly masters of circumstance to allow this inference to stand. Again, the attempt to cultivate at the same time the

religious and the business life is supposed by some to invite disaster. A distinguished scientist remarks: "Hawk and dragon-fly would starve if they tried to capture, or even regarded, more than one victim at a time." So it is suggested that we must concentrate attention on religion or business; but attempting both we are likely to make little out of either. The mistake here is in reckoning business and religion as two distinct things, when properly they are only one. As body and soul constitute one personality, and act together harmoniously, so the spiritual and practical life in their just and effectual working complete each other. The godly utilitarian may most truly say: "One thing I do." The last error we will name is to suppose that refined and lofty character naturally acts as a bar to worldly success. Nietzsche declares: "It is for one's virtues that one is most punished." But against the cynicism of the German philosopher we may confidently put the dictum of Octave Feuillet, the French novelist: "God seldom allows us to be ruined by our virtues." These men of the world may well answer each other, and the answer of the novelist is entirely satisfactory. Now and then high principle stands in the way of immediate worldly success; but that, as a rule, it forbids ultimate social success is a canon that cannot be allowed. No; when pious men are unsuccessful, it must not be assumed that

spiritual genius excludes practical understanding, or that the development of the spiritual life and material welfare are incongruous, or that spiritual character is, as a rule, inimical to worldly success. Facts do not sustain such conclusions.

The truth is that we live in a world full of inexplicable happenings. "Then again, I saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor yet bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favour to the learned; that the time of misfortune meeteth all, and that man does not even know his time; like fish which are taken in a destructive net; and like sparrows which are caught in a snare, like these are the sons of men ensnared in the time of misfortune, when it suddenly cometh upon them" (Eccles. ix. 11, 12). Of how little value wisdom is in this matter is evident from the humiliating fact that it is not only utterly unable to exempt the wise from the day of calamity, but that it does not even enable him to foresee it; and thus, with the rest of mankind, the wise are as suddenly, as ignorantly, and as inextricably ensnared by misfortune as the simple fish or bird.* Society is confused by myriads of mistakes in judgment, as well as by moral perversity. We mistake ourselves, and misjudge one another, so often are allocated to spheres

* Ginsburg.

where we can only flounder. When a packhorse is taken for Pegasus, or Pegasus is harnessed to a dray, trouble is brewing for all concerned. We misinterpret our age, misjudge the trend of events and movements which so deeply affect us. We are unable to penetrate to the cause of social, political, and fiscal changes, and are bewildered as to their course and consequences. All kinds of unknown factors enter into the various movements of politics and trade, and none can foresee the issue of succeeding fluctuations. Vinet truly observes: "There is often nothing more difficult than to form a correct judgment of the man who is successful." For, as Shakespeare has it:

> Fortune brings in some boats that are not steered.

Yet, if there is one thing more difficult than to form a correct judgment of the man who is successful, it is to form a true judgment of some who are unsuccessful; for misfortune wrecks boats steered by cleverest pilots. Personal success or failure is complicated by circumstances of practically infinite variety and ambiguity, and by the action of ten thousand different wills, chiefly erring wills. In the human world, so largely dominated by ignorance, caprice, and perversity, it is impossible to calculate with any degree of accuracy, as it is so easy to do in the realm of

nature, with its immutable law, uniform working, and inevitable sequence.

On this subject of accidents in life Dewar writes wisely. After telling of a man of sterling merit who unexpectedly and undeservedly came into humiliating circumstances which wrought so upon his mind that he went into a wood and hanged himself, the author makes this discriminating comment: "The notion that some power with fell design will baffle and destroy a good man is purely fantastic. To take it seriously would be to abdictate one's reason. We might as well adopt the fetish of a savage. What appals us in the spectacle of a good man, through no fault of his own, thus destroyed, is not the sense of fate, evil or other. Rather, it is the seeming absence of fate or plan. It is the idea of blindfold chance, not fate with the shears, that strikes terror to the heart. What if all men, who lived rightly and strove hard, were utterly at the mercy of chance which overwhelmed this one—who, then, could fight with good heart? It is because they feel instinctively that, in spite of mysterious exceptions, character and will have the mastery; they can plan their future and face events." * Yes; the belief that sustains us in the arduous struggle is that, despite mysterious exceptions, intelligence and righteousness are consistently honoured by that Divine

* "The Glamour of the Earth."

government which comprehends and directs all events however tangled and staggering they may sometimes seem. Cassius objects,

> Of your philosophy you make no use
> If you give place to accidental evils.

The mysterious exceptions to the general law we are bound to admit; but our philosophy serves us well if we recognise in accidental evils ordeals of moral discipline that we do not at present understand.

Let, then, the sons and daughters of unmerited misfortune lay to heart the two great truths of the text:

1. *That worldly fortune is not the highest end of life.* "Faith, being more precious than gold that perisheth." There is, then, something more precious than gold, and that something is faithful or noble character. We may attain wealth, renown, and whatever else is embraced in the worldly conception of success, yet miss the main prize. And thousands of successful men are conscious that they have missed it, missed the centre lily whilst they gained the chickweed round the fringe. Let us dare to maintain, and that in the face of all mockers, that the fine qualities of the Christian character outshine in worth all flowers of pleasure, stars of honour, or sheen of gold, and that when worldly dis-

tinction is attained through the bankruptcy of the soul it is the saddest irony the wide universe may know. On the other hand, to grow in simplicity, humility, unselfishness, and purity is to succeed brilliantly, whatever else betide. James Smetham's painting, poetry, and study of literature did not lead to conventional success or "getting on" in his vocation. Yet late in life he wrote: "In my own secret heart I look on myself as one who *has* got on, and got to his goal, as one who has got something a thousand times better than a fortune, more real, more inward, less in the power of others, less variable, more immortal, more eternal; as one whose feet are on a rock, his goings established, with a new song in his mouth, and joy on his head."* This was no vain idealism, no romancing of one attempting to hide from himself unpalatable truths, but the sincere confession of a soul rejoicing in the true riches, the triumphal note of one who had found already "the praise and glory and honour" which shall be revealed in their fullness "at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Happy indeed are the unlaurelled in the background, conventionally accounted failures, but who are undisgraced, unembittered, undismayed, because of a serene consciousness that they have succeeded, that they have acquired the gold that is good, that the honour which cometh from

* Prof. Knight, "Retrospects."

God is their unwithering garland, and that, by ministering to the best of their ability to their fellows, they have attained the highest rank of all. This is nobly to fail; and such failure is eternities beyond the social success which leaves a stained or sordid soul.

2. *That the supreme end of life, the perfection of character, is sometimes best attained through vicissitude and tribulation.* "Now for a little while, if need be, ye have been put to grief in manifold temptations," that ye might be perfected, as gold tried in the fire is purified; and so ultimately be found clothed with eternal beauty, fitted for high ministries, undimmed by shadow of failure. Few pains are keener than the sense of failure, and through this acutest of distresses duly sanctified our being reaches its finest attributes. A large part of the campos of Central Brazil is burnt every year at the end of the dry season; but as the vegetation is scanty the fires pass quickly onwards, and do not appear to injure the trees and plants. Indeed, botanists believe that the vegetation benefits by the burning. As soon as the rains come, the scorched plants produce foliage earlier than where there has been no fire, and often produce flowers when unburnt trees or shrubs of the same species remain flowerless. How often in the vineyard of God, where the flame of calamity has left a trail of loss and blight, springs the very pride of the

garden! The sunshine of life, the glow of success, too often is made to flatter our vanity; whilst as Balzac puts it, "The feeling of our own littleness always brings us into the presence of God," His purifying and beautifying presence.

Strangely puzzling and painful are the variations of fortune to which we are subjected. We strive to make the best of things, as we are bound to do; yet the stone so laboriously rolled uphill has a sad trock of rolling down again. For awhile we are successful, then the tide ebbs, we are balked and baffled; now it is sunshine, fostering our flowers, mellowing our fruits, and again nipping frost and disastrous blight; now we are lifted up, only once more to be cast down. There are times when we reflect sadly over this medley of fortune and misfortune, of doing and undoing, of hope and failure; and the apparently mocking, abortive life tempts us to despair. We ask ourselves: What is the good of it all? What the profit of this thinking, aching, striving, succeeding, failing? Now, this kind of soliloquy is as though a tree should bemoan itself: What is the use of annually clothing myself with leaves? They are ever being stripped away again—sometimes the east wind withers them, or they are consumed by drought, or eaten by the caterpillar, or the last lingerers are torn away by the autumn blast, and once more I stand gaunt and stark against the winter's sky! For a hundred summers, with infinite endeavour, have I clothed my

branches with foliage and flower, only once more to be left stripped and desolate. What is the good? The good! Why, not a solitary leaf has unfolded in vain; not in vain has a single blossom blown or faded; each leaf and blossom, coming and going, year in, year out, has added new strength to the stem, fresh glory to the branches, making of the forest monarch at last a most goodly sight for poet's song or artist's picture. So with this chequered life of ours; hit or miss, song or sigh, victory or defeat, it is only perfecting us in the will of God, rooting us the more deeply in eternal grounds, developing us in strength, loveliness, and fruition, preparing us for the paradise where the sun knows no eclipse and the leaf is always green.

XVII

MYSTERIOUS FAILURE IN CHARACTER

A righteous man falleth seven times, and riseth up again.—PROV. xxiv. 16.

A SINCERE man is apt to be distressed by the sense of failure when in fact the experience he bemoans is far from being real failure. Aiming at a great ideal we may well fail to reach all we propose without visiting upon ourselves bitter reproach. This must be distinguished from moral failure. When the New Testament standard of excellence is our ideal, it is not at all unlikely that we may often be troubled by the sense of shortcoming, whilst an inferior ideal will leave us complacent or even vain. Philip G. Hamerton, replying to critics who called in question the truth and beauty of Turner's pictures, defends the work of the famous master on the ground that he was a brilliant experimentalist, attempting splendid effects far beyond any merely technical achievement. "Fancies that broke through" colour "and escaped." "He was always trying to paint the unpaintable, which the Dutch and the

Venetians most prudently avoided. De Hooge could paint a Dutch woman standing in her backyard, close to her dust-bin, with a degree of pictorial efficiency incomparably superior to that of Turner when he painted the Angel standing in the Sun." This failure to reach transcendent excellence is true of the saint in an accentuated degree. "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord." "That ye would walk worthy of God." Such an ideal may often leave us grieving over actual attainment. Coveting to possess the mind that was in Christ, and to walk as He also walked, is to prepare for ourselves many paradoxical hours in which delight and painfulness will strangely mingle. Corot confessed: "When I find myself in one of Nature's beautiful places, I grow angry with my pictures"; and finding ourselves in the presence of our divine Lord, we naturally grow angry with ourselves.

Failing seven times thus, the sincere rise up again, and each time in increased power and perfectness. It was always difficult to convince one of the generals in the American Civil War that he had won the victory. In the spiritual life real conquest may be mistaken for arrest and defeat, and the disciple is cast down when he has most reason for fresh joy and courage. The consciousness of failure accompanies aspiration and striving; and aspiration towards the perception

revealed in our Lord implies the inspiration that finally makes the more than conqueror.

Yet too often, alas! we have occasion justly to accuse ourselves of real lapses in faith and duty. Such failure is, perhaps, generally confined within our personal knowledge; but none the less it fills us with surprise and humiliation. Sometimes the failure is open to the world. "The shield of the mighty is vilely cast away," and the believer of accredited reputation and public influence is put to shame before his neighbours. To the sincere these are days of bitter sorrow and darkness. In all troubles from the outside we have rich consolations, and a secret strength is infused with our distresses; but a spirit wounded by the sense of gross unfaithfulness is without these precious compensations and is hard to bear. God alone knows the agony of the soul overtaken by a fault. "And when he thought thereon, he went out and wept bitterly." This anguish it were profane to attempt to picture. And these failures of character in the Church are its chiefest calamity. The removal by death of the faithful is a sacred sorrow, and their presence and influence are sorely missed, yet this deprivation is also brightened by gracious memories and hopes; but the backslider only compromises the sacramental host, and leaves it mourning. "I had rather had eleven die nobly for their country, than one

voluptuously surfeit out of action," is a pathetic regret that means deeper sorrow and dishonour to the Church than it does to the State.

What, then, is the duty of the penitent soul in the day of disloyalty and sin?

First of all, there is no place for despair. This is the terrible temptation of men overtaken by a fault. That our lapses ought to be deeply laid to heart is most true. Failures in faith and conduct are infinitely more deplorable than failure in circumstance. The loss of fortune and popularity is frequently the consequence of events over which we have no manner of control; whilst real moral failure is the result of unwatchfulness, cowardice, and weakness for which we are and must be held responsible. To regard such failure lightly argues a serious deficiency in conscience and feeling. Yet, on the other hand, let us beware of remorse and despair. Our Lord certainly designed by His treatment of faithless Peter to teach all who might similarly fall that a place was left for repentance. The position assigned in the evangelic narrative to his infidelity, contrition, and reclamation, makes it evident that our Lord designed that its great lessons of warning and consolation should be kept vividly before His Church through all generations. He who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, is not willing that the guiltiest apostate should perish. And St.

Paul, in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians, recommending the church, after it had purged itself from suspicion of complicity with immorality, to restore the penitent to its fellowship, shows how fully the apostle had grasped the Christian doctrine of mercy and forgiveness. Perhaps the Church of Christ in later ages has only imperfectly appreciated the mind of its Master on this delicate subject. Be this as it may, let none who have unhappily fallen into condemnation despair of the grace of God. To do so is to blacken the blackest blot which can defile our raiment.

Next we must inquire into the secret of our fall; and often it is a secret, the cause by no means being manifest on the surface. Engineers not so long ago were greatly exercised as to the real reason for the disastrous failure of the Quebec Bridge. These steel structures are carefully inspected, and the severest tests are applied to every part of them. The inspection of the material and built-up sections in a bridge-shop is generally carried out most thoroughly. The rivets are tapped to ascertain their tightness, and are promptly cut out and replaced should they be found to be loose. Specimens are cut from the plates and tested for ductility and tensile strength, and yet, notwithstanding all these precautions, the weak places may not be disclosed; the fact being that these places lie in the very

texture of the material, in the micro-structure of the metal, an examination of which is impossible. Even more mysterious are the failures in religious faith, principle, character, which from time to time startle us. Nothing appears on the surface to suggest defect; nay, we may well believe that an examination going far beneath the surface would not explain the disastrous collapse. We can only infer that the weakness lay deep in the soul itself. Just as a bubble in the casting may cause a flaw in the steel and occasion a dire catastrophe, so some secret frailty of faith, reservation of surrender, sympathy with evil, or undefined sickliness of soul, may bring about in the hour of temptation surprising and humiliating failure. So far from attempting to explain our fallings away from faith and righteousness by superficial considerations, let us look closely into the depths and very texture of the soul itself, for the final reason of our backsliding. The falsity that solves the sad problem is in the inward parts; in the hidden part is the fateful folly. Not that *we* can always penetrate the secret of failure. The most experienced analyst will acknowledge that in his testing of fractured material he is constantly brought face to face with the inscrutable. With all modern scientific aids, such as mechanical testing by tension, alternating stresses, shock or repeated impact, chemical analysis and microscopic examination, the

investigation of isolated cases of mysterious failure becomes a task of almost hopeless difficulty. If, then, the cleverest judges are baffled in seeking the obscure origin of mechanical failure, how much more shall we be dumb before the breaking down of apparently noble character! The subtleties of the soul must often be left with Him who weigheth the spirits.

Yet, whatever in failure is mysterious or even inscrutable, it is our duty to prove ourselves and as far as possible to ascertain the nature of our inability, the cause of our stumbling. Somewhere in the Metropolis exists what is probably a unique museum of broken materials used in engineering work; it is a splendidly organised testing laboratory, wherein have been held many practical tests upon materials which have failed. As you glance round the museum, writes a visitor, "containing hundreds of broken pieces of steel, iron, brass, wood, stone, and cement, you instinctively feel that the stories which have been revealed by such methods are the foundations upon which it is safe to build." What is God's most Holy Word but a divine laboratory to determine the causes of moral calamity? In the light of its varied and searching teachings we may generally perceive why we were overthrown in the critical hour. What was wrong in the grain and fibre, in the foundation, relation, and harmony of wrecked things is mani-

fested in that museum of experiments; and what in faith, conscience, sentiment, or purpose precipitates moral catastrophe is quickly demonstrated to the serious student of revelation. A lath may be painted to look like iron, iron may be badly wrought, steel improperly mingled, wood rotten, and mortar unripe; but the chemist in the chamber of practical criticism sets the secret of disaster in the light of day, and all may see why the instrument or structure yielded when it was most needed: so by thought, reading, and prayer may we examine ourselves, and know why we succumb in the fiery hour.

This investigation is not so much curious retrospect, but we ascertain the causes of failure to prevent its recurrence. Practical men know that it is of greatest importance that every effort should be made to clear up the causes of unexpected breakages, since it is from these failures that engineers and metallurgists best derive the knowledge that alone can lead to further progress. The museum just mentioned is used not only to discover the cause of breakdowns in material, but very largely also to test substances which it is proposed to employ in the construction of buildings and machinery. By testing his material, the quack inventor, who flourishes almost as much as the medical quack, is detected and plausible material exposed. How careful ought we to be as to the material we work into

the fabric of character! "Let each man take heed how he buildeth thereon. . . . But if any man buildeth on the foundation gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, stubble, each man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it is revealed in fire; and the fire itself shall prove each man's work of what sort it is." Duly warned by past failure, let us anticipate coming ordeals; and so prove our maxims, motives and methods, our temper and sympathies, by the infallible criticisms of God's Word and Spirit, that we shall encounter the future with sterling, trustworthy principles and qualities. It is a singular fact that by a delicate test conducted by polarised light the incidence of strain upon iron and steel structures may be gauged, and dangerous pressures and places be understood and provided against. So, by the heavenly light, the secrets of the heart are manifested, its weak spots and dangerous tendencies ascertained, its germs of evil exposed and destroyed. If we are perfectly sincere, the great advantage springing from the blunders of past years will be that we know so much better our weaknesses, and are so much better equipped to meet the temptations and trials which will inevitably assail us. "For every one that doeth ill hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, lest his works should be reproved. But he that doeth the truth cometh to the light, that his

works may be made manifest, that they have been wrought in God."

The final lesson to be taken to heart is that we ought ever to live in the fullness of our Christian faith and resource. Scientists tell us that they cannot but marvel at the extraordinary reserve power everywhere manifested in nature. In the north the sugar maple secretes a sugary sap so abundantly that many gallons can be annually drawn away from a single tree without diminishing its production in future years or perceptibly shortening its life. In the tropics, other trees produce so different a substance as india rubber, which can be indefinitely extracted in the same manner. It is impossible to believe that these, and a hundred other diverse kinds of sap, were not primarily developed to further the growth and vigour of the plant itself and to aid it in its struggle for existence with other plants. Yet whenever man draws off this precious fluid for his own purposes, nature seems always ready to make up the deficiency, so that the plant shall not suffer injury. It may perhaps be the case that this wonderful recuperative power has been developed for the purpose of guarding against the chance injuries inflicted by boring insects, wood-pecking birds, or scratching, biting, and goring mammals, whose combined attacks might

otherwise destroy the vigour of the species and thus endanger its existence.*

It is exactly in this surplus resource that the disciples of Christ are so often lacking. We are content to live feebly, and thus live in peril. We have little of this marvellous reserve supply, this wonderful recuperative power, and therefore when subject to uncommon strain we are forthwith exhausted and vanquished. We simply live from hand to mouth. Our lapses into ungodly unbeliefs and irregular conduct show that we are only equal to ordinary duty, scarcely equal to that, whilst every part of our character ought to be vastly stronger than ordinary situations call for. "Be ye filled with the Spirit." What does this doctrine of plenary spiritual endowment mean but that we should possess abundance of stored energy rendering us proof against every malign attack, triumphant over the severest trials to which we can be subjected!

* "Notes of a Botanist," Spruce.

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